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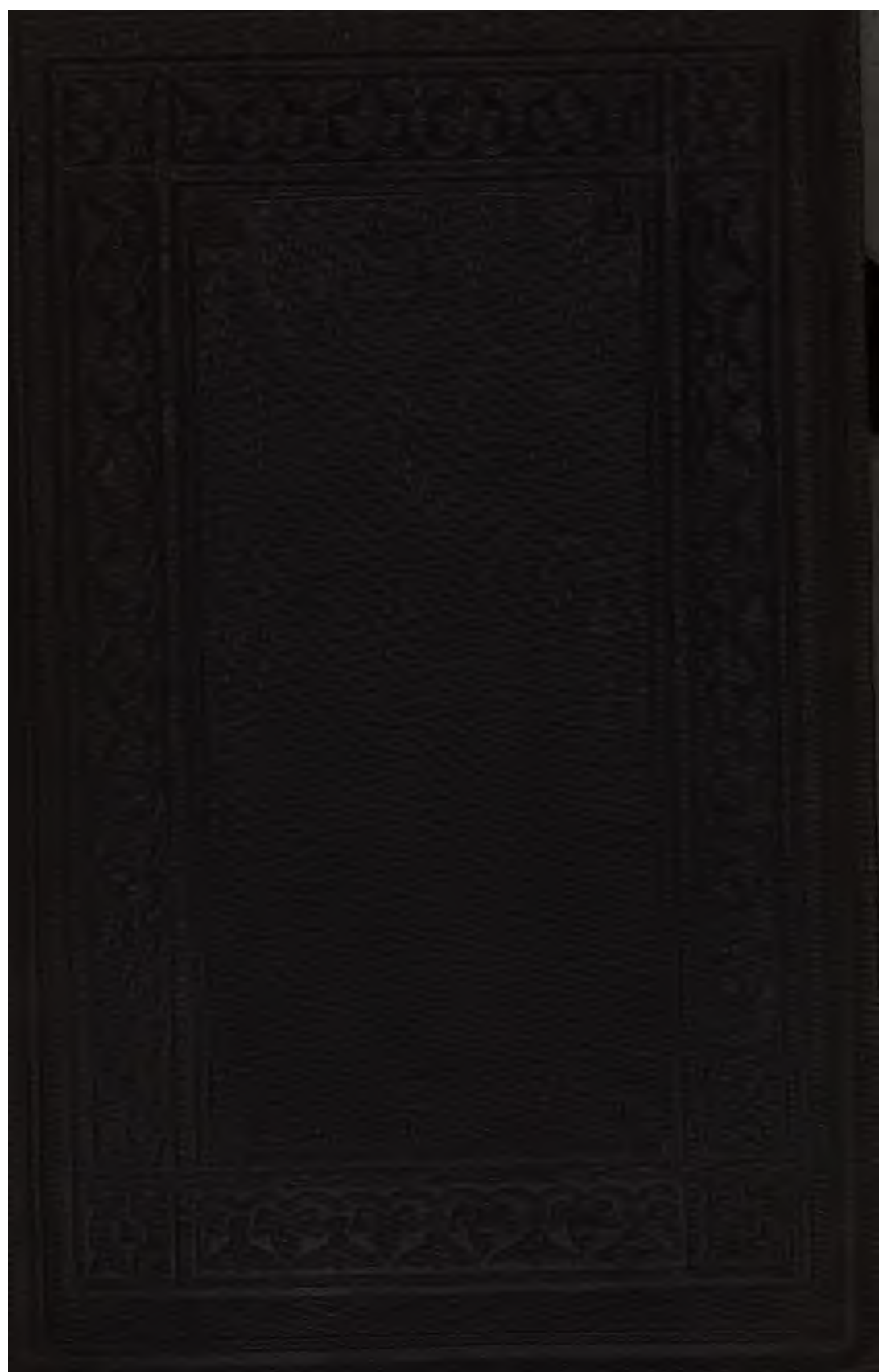
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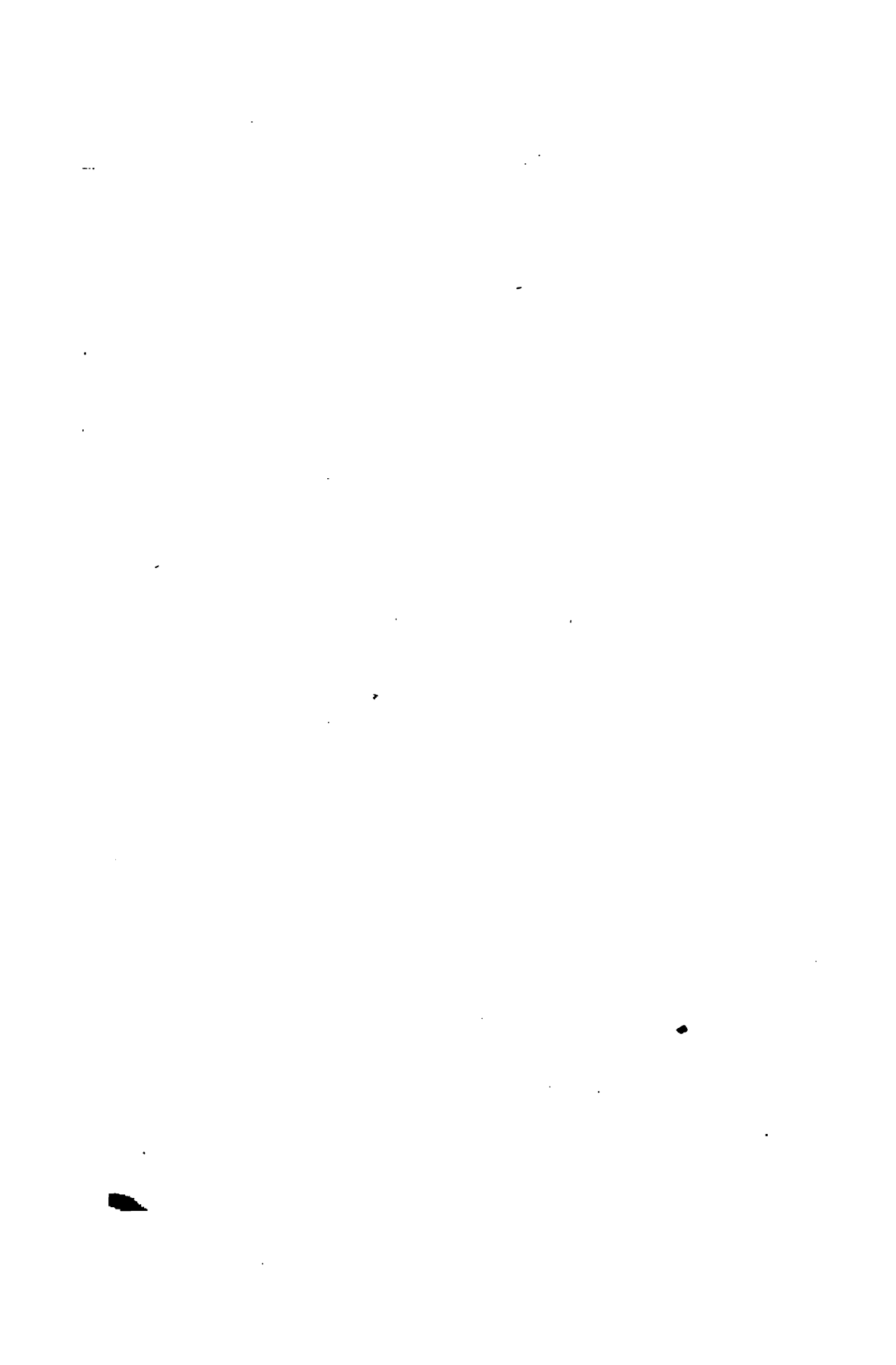
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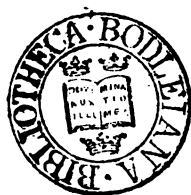
HOMILIES.

HOMILIES
ON THE
FORMER PART
OF THE
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,
CHAP. I—X.

BY
HENRY ALFORD, B.D.
DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

LONDON:
RIVINGTONS, WATERLOO PLACE.
1858.

101. b. 3.



TO MY LATE

SUNDAY AFTERNOON CONGREGATION

IN QUEBEC CHAPEL,

These Homilies

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

IN MEMORY OF A TIME

DURING WHICH

WE MUTUALLY ENCOURAGED ONE ANOTHER

IN SEARCHING AND UNDERSTANDING

THE PRECIOUS WORD OF GOD.

PREFACE.

THESE Homilies contain the substance of a series of expository lectures on the Acts, delivered on Sunday afternoons at Quebec Chapel, during the years 1856-7. They were preached from notes, and taken down in short-hand: and it must not therefore be expected that they should possess the same finished character as to style and choice of words, as written sermons. My object in now committing them to the press is, to subserve the belief, which I have endeavoured to elucidate in them, viz., that the Holy Spirit, in this important book, has unfolded to us the thread of the Gospel in a regular order, and in strict accordance with the manifestation of its great leading doctrines. If the consistent apprehension of this idea shall be promoted among the readers of Scripture, any roughness of style, or charge of inelegance in diction, will be very lightly esteemed by me in comparison.

In compiling these lectures I owed much to two German works: the excellent though sometimes fanciful treatise of Baumgarten, now translated into English; and the antagonistic treatise of Lekebusch, which serves as a balance-wheel for the too rapid hypothesising tendencies of Baumgarten.

I have ventured to call these Lectures "Homilies," after the example of our great master of expository preaching, John Chrysostom.

WESTON SUPER MARE,
May, 28, 1858.

HOMILY I.

CHAPTER I. 1—8.

Before beginning this new portion of our expository Lectures, it may be well to say a few words to you on the reason which led me to determine on continuing them, and which also led me to the choice of this book of Holy Scripture on which to continue them. I have believed, that expository discourses on Scripture will be of great importance to us all. The knowledge of the Bible in our own days is by no means proportionate to the abundance of copies of the Book itself distributed amongst us. And this is particularly the case among the educated classes. I believe that if an estimate could be taken by any means at the present moment, of the various ranks of society in this country, as to their knowledge of the Scriptures, their contents and their meaning, — the advantage would be found by very far indeed to rest with the lower and the labouring classes. Our schools have become so frequent, and the general training in those schools is for the most part now so good, that it is not very often that you meet with a respectably educated person, male or female, of the lower classes, who has not a pretty thorough acquaintance with the contents of the Bible; while it is very common indeed to meet with a person among the higher classes, knowing much of civil matters, much, very likely, of the religious acts of life, who has hardly any acquaintance with the matter of the Bible. Indeed I do not see how in fashionable society it is possible for children

1

to know anything of it; for the life of the family is led in contradiction to the Bible; the Bible is not made use of, nor recognized at all, except for certain perfunctory observances, which are soon over, and the termination of which no one regrets. In Christian families, the case might be different, and ought to be different: but even there we very often find (and I speak as one whose daily business is with the text of Scripture, labouring and working over it) phenomena of ignorance of the Bible which are positively astounding. We find that persons do not know the difference between one Gospel and another, nor between one book of Scripture and another, as to order, or as to contents; and we very often see that they have not an intelligent idea of even the most frequently quoted texts.

Now while such things as these are found in society, and in Christian society (and they are certainly continually found, in the experience of any student of Scripture) expository Lectures cannot be thrown away. We shall at all events have gone through the books of Scripture that we are enabled to take up, and shall know something of their order and contents; and whatever may be said of the exposition itself, yet the very circumstance of having gone regularly over so much Scripture, and read out its contents, in some fashion of course directing the thoughts and attention to them, must be beneficial.

And as for those who do know the Scripture, on the principle which our Lord himself has laid down in the Christian dispensation, that "to him that hath shall be given", they surely will gain more even, by expository Lectures, than the others. No man who really knows the Bible, will ever be wearied by hearing it laid forth and explained. It would be a very good test of knowledge of the Bible, whether a man does shrink from spending his time in that way. I rather suspect, that if those who have complained (and there are a few certainly who have—I know it to be so) of these expository Lectures, and who have wished for practical Ser-

mons, could be put to the test, it would be found that it is not because they know Scripture too well, but because they know so little of it, and because they have little relish for going into the depths of it, and examining it carefully and accurately.

Therefore I have determined to continue these expository Lectures. And now to speak of the book, upon which my choice has been directed. We have just finished the Gospel of St. John. We have arrived at that portion of the Scripture history, and of the history of the Christian Church, where our Lord's bodily presence is withdrawn. This naturally begets a wish to go forward. I might have taken another Gospel; and I did very much incline to the Gospel of St. Luke: but then the idea crossed my mind, that we should be going entirely back to the very beginning; not only should we have much ground to go over again (that perhaps would be no great harm) but we should have our thoughts taken away from the place in which they stood in the direct course of the history, and thrown back again to the very beginning, even before the ministry of our Lord—a point indeed always important for them to be directed to, and to begin from: but still in the regular course it seemed to me that we should go onward historically. And that opinion naturally directed my view to this book.

Then again, there are several reasons belonging to the book itself, why it is very important for us to consider and explain it, especially at the present time. It is important for us, because it contains the opening history of the Christian Church. There is no subject about which people's minds are so much divided, as the constitution and regulation and doctrine of the Church of Christ; and there is no subject perhaps upon which they would be so little divided, in the main at least, I firmly believe, had they studied thoroughly this book of Scripture. It is most interesting to every Christian, as containing the openings of that Church to which we belong; the infant days of that which has now

grown up, through various ages of God's superintending providence, to be what Christ himself prophesied it would be, a shelter, outwardly at least, for the nations of the earth.

Another reason is, that not only is this book the opening history of the Christian Church, but every word of it belongs to the same spiritual dispensation under which we are now living. While we were speaking of our Lord's discourses, and the events of his life, we were continually beset by this difficulty—no great one indeed, but yet constantly to be borne in mind—that our Lord, all through his discourses, and while in the flesh, was dealing with a state of things which his Crucifixion and his Resurrection, his Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, have greatly modified. While His sight pierced onward to the end, and every thing that He spoke had a meaning for every age of his Church, still we must never forget that we are to discover that meaning, and that we are to discover that meaning in and by the following portion of the New Testament. Now the whole of this difficulty is removed in the Acts of the Apostles. They stood on the same ground as we are standing on; that is to say, they were dealing with the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and we are now living under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. They were looking for the second coming of the Lord; we are now looking for the second coming of the Lord. It is true, they were living in a day of miracles, and of signs, and of special tokens of their ascended Lord's presence with them, which were necessary stays, so to speak, for the tottering footsteps of the Church, while it was in the midst of dangers and difficulties and persecutions; and those are now removed: but still that removal has not one whit altered the state of things, or the dispensation under which we now live. Those were mere accidents; accidents belonging to the necessities of that day, and not belonging to the necessities of ours.

Another reason for choosing this book is, that we live in a day of considerable danger in one direction, and that

direction, strange to say, after all that has passed over the Church of Christ, after the Reformation three hundred years ago, the direction of defalcation to the Church of Rome. Now of all the books of Scripture antagonistic to any such view of Christian doctrine or practice as that Church entertains, there is none so pointedly antagonistic as the Acts of the Apostles; and it is a book which, if thoroughly studied by young persons, by persons who are tempted that way, would tend I think, by God's blessing, more perhaps than any other book of Scripture (though they all would contribute to it), to set them right, on account of its simple, straight-forward, earnest testimony to the doctrine of faith in Christ, to the doctrine of liberty of private judgment in things belonging to God, and to the fact, that the teaching of his Spirit is the only infallible guide. I therefore trust, that these expository Lectures of ours may be a humble contribution that way, and may in their place in some measure stop what I cannot but call (and I call it so in consideration of that ignorance of Scripture which I have been speaking of) the senseless tendency of our present day in the direction which I have mentioned: senseless, because God has informed us better. He has given us his Word to study, and now we are backsliding again almost into the times before we had that Word opened to us. Now this end I hope in some measure to contribute to; but it will not be by controversy. I shall endeavour as much as possible to avoid all purely controversial topics. Some must necessarily come before us, because they occur in the process of the history; because the Apostles and the early Christians themselves were in controversy about them. There, we cannot help ourselves. But matters of controversy in the present day, I shall avoid as much as possible, just holding up to you the simple truth with the book declares, and leaving it to shine upon the opposite untruth; instead of dealing with their respective features separately.

With these remarks then, we come to the book itself.

I have just said that I would avoid controversial points. I will not therefore trouble you with any disquisitions, interesting as they are to those whose duty it is to go into such points, as to who was the author of the book. It has always been believed that it was written by St. Luke; and so far from seeing any reason to doubt it, I see upon a study of the two books, the Gospel and the Acts, in the original language, every reason to confirm it. The Holy Spirit, when he inspired the Evangelists to write the Gospels and other books, did not take from them their individual character. We can tell just as well what was written by St. John (as for instance take the Gospel and the First Epistle—who could ever doubt that they were written by the same man?) as we could tell, had he never been inspired. And such is the case with St. Luke. St. Luke's is a peculiar style. He was a man most probably, in a worldly sense, of better education than the rest of the writers of the New Testament. He was a physician. Although that profession did not then hold the place which it now does, but was practised very much by persons nominally in a state of servitude, still he would be a person who had studied, a person who knew the polite language of civilized life; and so his style differs much from that of the rest of the writers of the New Testament. We find these tokens in the Gospel. We find there continual instances of a more laboured, a more polished, a more accumulated style, so to speak, than in St. John, or any of the other Evangelists; he is fond of compound words, verbs with many prepositions put before them, longer words. And so it is in this book likewise; we find the same characteristics; and those who choose to pursue them, and have the opportunity, will be abundantly confirmed in the traditional view, which appears to be perfectly right, that St. Luke wrote both.

A confirmation of this circumstance is, that they are both addressed to the same person. Who he was we cannot tell. "O THEOPHILUS." He calls him in the Gospel

"*most excellent Theophilus*", which title seems to imply that he was one of high birth or rank. It was very customary in those days (it has been so likewise in our own) to inscribe books to persons of this kind, to put them under, as it were, their special patronage; and most likely Theophilus was some Christian believer of high rank, to whom St. Luke, as was the custom of the time, dedicated his two treatises.

We call this book "*THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES*". The title has of course not the same sanction as the book itself; and is in fact, an insufficient title, although it is one which no one would think of attempting now to change, after it has been so long in use in the Christian world. For the book does not represent the *acts of the Apostles* in any clear terms. The acts of many of the Apostles are not so much as even once mentioned; their names only once, and nothing else concerning them. If it should have been called the Acts of any of the Apostles, it would have been of St. Peter and St. Paul, for those are the two whose acts prevail throughout. We must not therefore think, that the contents of the book are in any way bound by the title, or that we are constrained to justify the one by the other.

The book begins by telling us of a "*FORMER TREATISE*". And this is an important point; because we do not find in it anything by way of a preface declaring its purpose, or that which the writer had in his mind in putting it forth. Now in the *Gospel*, you know that we do find this. The first four verses of the Gospel of St. Luke are very important. It may be just as well to read them over to you; because the Gospel is here referred to, and the same purpose may be assumed to have been in the mind of the writer, under the guidance of the Spirit, at this time also. He says there, "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having

had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed". That then was the purpose of the former treatise, and that is the purpose, in its place, of this one likewise.

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus BEGAN both to do and teach." The word "began" here is an emphatic word.* As relating to the Gospel, it shews us that the Gospel contained only the OPENING of the work of Jesus, namely that which he did in the flesh. The setting forth further of the same deeds of Jesus is reserved for this book. And so the word is not a mere expletive, as some would have us to believe—"of all things that Jesus did and taught"; for it stands in fact in the place of emphasis, and directs our attention to the difference of the contents of the two books: that related to us the beginnings; this will relate the progress.

But you must not make one mistake (and that mistake has been made)—"of all that Jesus began both to do and teach"—implying, as some have said, that *others* were to continue that doing and teaching, *and not* Jesus: but it is not so. The order of the words in the original will not permit this. It is Jesus that both BEGAN to do and to teach, and is to CONTINUE; and the stress is simply on the word "began". "The former treatise have I made of all that Jesus BEGAN both to do and teach"; and this which is coming is, what Jesus continued to do and to

* It is obvious, that any conclusion which is drawn as to its significance here from passages such as Luke iii 8, iv 21, v 21, vii 15, 38, xiii 25, xiv 9, is worth nothing, unless it takes into account the diversity, and nature of the same word occurring in ordinary narrative, and in solemn recapitulation. As far as those passages prove anything, they go to substantiate the emphatic sense here; for in no one of them does the verb *ἤρξατο* lose its meaning.

teach, only no longer in person, but now by his messengers and by his Spirit.

I will not give you at present any synopsis of the contents of the book. It would be a wearisome thing to send you searching forward through its various chapters to make out its different divisions, at this time. They will come before us as we go on; though we shall have occasion just to touch briefly upon some parts of the eighth verse, as giving an outline of the contents of the whole book. I will only say now, that it embraces thirty-three years of the history of the Christian Church after our Lord's Ascension. That Ascension is the opening point from with the book starts. It was the point, in fact, common to both: common to our Lord's life upon earth, and to the dispensation of the Spirit afterwards: it is the conclusion of the one, and it is the beginning of the other. And therefore we need not be surprised that St. Luke, after having already given us the Ascension in the Gospel, proceeds here again to detail it at the opening, by way of making complete his treatise of the new dispensation.

He asserts in this first verse, that he had made a treatise "of *ALL* that Jesus began both to do and teach"; and that word is also to be noted; in fact every word is to be noted in Scripture. You see that he manifestly claims for his Gospel just exactly that which St. John disclaims at the end of his. St. John, as we had to remark the other Sunday, said that there were "many other things which Jesus did" which are not written in his book. Now St. Luke tells us that he had made a treatise "of *all* that Jesus began both to do and teach". He does not mean by this, that every single thing that our Lord, did and every word that He said, were written in his Gospel, but that that Gospel was complete; that it had begun at the very earliest moment requisite for the history of our Lord's life on earth, and had not terminated till the latest moment requisite for the same thing. Now we know that this is the case with St. Luke's Gospel, and that it is

the case with that Gospel alone of the four; that it does begin with the very first notices of our Lord's birth, indeed of the birth of His forerunner: and that it does not end until after the account of the Ascension; presenting us therefore with a complete account of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach".

"Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen". This was the point at which the Gospel history ended, as we have noticed before. Now there is an expression or two here, that we cannot pass by. He says that Christ "through the Holy Ghost" gave these commandments to the Apostles whom He had chosen. He chose them; they were his messengers; they were to stand in his stead in declaring the Gospel to the world; but the commandments that he gave to them were "through the Holy Ghost". Why is this here mentioned? Do not the words seem to come in rather strangely? Does it not seem as if the sentence would have been simpler, and as we might say at first sight, perhaps better, if it had been merely "after that he had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen"? We might say so, but we should be mistaken. The dispensation about to open, and of which the Acts is to be the record of the opening, is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost; and the Evangelist, having regard to this, places here at the very beginning a clause of this kind, that it was through the Holy Ghost, in the power of the Spirit given to Him without measure, in the power of the Spirit dwelling upon Him now especially after his triumph and his resurrection, that our Lord gave these commandments to his Apostles. In fact we know that it was so, from the narrative of St. John; because when he gave his commandments, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost".

Then St. Luke goes on to say, *"To whom also He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible*

proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God". This verse, I take it, is especially inserted to make a marked difference between the time of our Lord's life in the flesh, and the time of his converse with his disciples after his resurrection. When he was yet with them, He was continuously seen by them; He was seen just as you or I are seen by our friends and acquaintances and by the men around us. But after his resurrection, this was not the case: He made himself visible when He pleased; "HE REVEALED HIMSELF to his disciples," as St. John says, "at the sea of Tiberias, and He revealed himself on this wise". It was a different state of life. And this is meant by these words, „He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them"; but then it is not, seen continuously, but seen as in a vision—"ὀπτανόμενος"—being seen as in an apparition; being now and then seen by them, during those forty days.

"And speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Now notice again here, how very important and how interesting these little variations are. We have notices in the Gospel of St. Luke of this period; but every notice there looks BACK. Our Lord explains what He has said to them; He goes over the Scriptures; He points out to them "the things concerning Himself". "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Here, every thing points FORWARD. During those forty days he was "seen of them", and he "spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"; that kingdom which was now founded upon earth, and which was to be unfolded and developed in the course of the ages going on. There is not a word here, any more than in any part of Scripture, which is spoken idly, or which is too much, or which does not belong to the matter in hand.

"And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but

wait for the promise of the Father, which, said He, ye have heard of me." They had been, we know, in Galilee since the Resurrection; and that was by the special command of our Lord also. He said, "Behold, I go before you into Galilee, and there shall ye see me"; and there they had seen Him. They had returned from Galilee, and were now in Jerusalem again. There they were to remain; there they were to take their last farewell of Him; there they were to wait for the descent of the Spirit. From that point they were to be dispersed, in God's providential time, when persecution arose, on their various paths of duty. Jerusalem was the centre of God's dealings in the beginning of the Church, as it had been the centre of his dealings with his people of old. It had not lost its interest or its title, notwithstanding the deeds that had been there done in rejection of the Lord of life: for when St. Matthew is telling us of what happened at our Lord's death, he says, that "many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the HOLY CITY and appeared unto many". Jerusalem was still "the HOLY CITY". If we may use such an expression, the Lord's thoughts lingered about that place where He had wished to gather together the inhabitants "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and they would not". In Jerusalem then, the Apostles were to wait. Important on various accounts was this command. They were to be all together, when "the promise of the Father" came upon them. They were not to be strewed about in various places, over Judea, or over the world, when they were to witness it. It was to be an event testified to by the whole Church, as it was meant for the whole Church.

"But wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me." They had heard from our Lord, as related in the 14th chapter of St. John, and several times during those final discourses of his,—that the Father would

send them "another Comforter", even the Holy Ghost, "the Spirit of truth", who was to come in his Son's name, and to "abide with them for ever". This was "the promise of the Father". And notice here how the Spirit, and the Spirit's work, shine forth from this time forward in the New Testament, as the head and front of all dignity and all action and all promise whatever. "The promise of the Father"; as if there never had been another. It was the promise to which all else converged. Wherever you find promises in the prophets, of glory, or of the kingdom being restored to Israel, or of anything else, you will find them all summed up in the presence and influence and working of the Spirit. That is the great promise of God, the "unspeakable gift", the result of the other "unspeakable gift", the Son of God, through whom the Spirit comes.

"For", he proceeds, *"John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence"*. Now this verse is a very important one, because it pointed out to the Apostles the contrast between the former state of things, and that new one which was to set in. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, but was not attended with the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Ghost, as St. John the Evangelist tells us in the seventh chapter, "was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified". There was no baptism with the Holy Ghost under the Old Testament dispensation; and this is a point interesting to observe and to trace. You may notice it as connected with the very different state of life and morality, in Christian days, from that which prevailed before the days of our Lord's manifestation. Take any of the great men of the Old Testament, and compare them with men in the spiritual times. Take for instance Moses, David, Solomon. Strong as they were in faith of God's promise, highly honoured as they were by being vessels of the Holy Spirit, persons inspired to write the books of the Old Testament, their moral rule was very different from ours. There was not that entire possession

with the Spirit; there were far grosser fallings into sin; it seems as if they were almost by violence kept in the kingdom of Heaven, so to speak. There was not that immersion even, for the figure must be remembered in an expression of this kind;—the preposition is in the former case not expressed;—"John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Ghost not many days hence" is the literal rendering;—there was not that immersion, so to speak, in the Spirit, that having to drink in the Spirit, that being penetrated by Him and his influence, which there now is in the most ordinary Christian life. We stand on higher ground; we have the Spirit given to us, as many as believe in Christ, in a way in which they never had Him given to them: and this is the contrast here pointed out. We shall have occasion to notice this again, if we are spared so long, in the 19th chapter, with regard to those converts whom Paul asked whether they "received the Holy Ghost when they believed".

"Not many days hence." Why that particular time? Why have they not received the Spirit sooner? Why do they receive it so soon? are questions which may well be asked. They did not receive it sooner, for the reason I have mentioned, "because Jesus was not yet glorified". The channel through which the Holy Spirit was to come upon the Church was not yet prepared. He has become to us now the Mediator at God's throne; He is filled with that Spirit; and we, who are joined to Him in the flesh by being of one race, and joined to Him in the Spirit by believing on Him, are filled with that Spirit also, each in the measure in which we seek to avail ourselves of his grace. After he was thus lifted up, after he was raised from the dead (for the Ascension was merely the outward realization of the great antecedent fact),—when he spoke these words, He was in the same state as He is at the present moment at God's right hand; the Holy Spirit has since that come down upon the Church, but could not before it.

Then, why so soon? Further delay would have been contrary to all the faithful promises of God, and to all the faithful necessities of man. The time was full. The Saviour had been prepared and had gone through his work; every thing was now ready. In his own words in that remarkable parable, "the oxen and the fatlings were killed, and all things were ready" for the feast. And therefore it became God, who had been faithful to his promises ever, and who was faithful then, to pour out that Spirit without any more delay—with only just enough delay to try the faith of those who were there assembled, to give them time to wait; for "it is good that a man both hope and wait for the salvation of the Lord." It should be remembered also, that the legal divisions of time would naturally tally with the evangelical, as type and antitype. This would however make, not the legal the reason, but the evangelical, and the converse: seeing that the antitype is prior in causality to, and the source of the type, however subsequent chronologically.

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Now it is commonly said, that they misunderstood our Lord's words when they asked this question. But I would rather regard the question as the best possible proof that they understood what our Lord meant; that they had profited by his instruction during those forty days. They connected in their minds with the immediate promise of the descent of the Spirit, exactly that very thing which God had ever connected with it: for if you look through all the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the restoration and the future glory of Israel,—restoring the kingdom to them,—you will find that they are always connected with this promise of the Spirit; and accordingly, that promise of the Spirit now brought into the minds of the Apostles the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. There is a little obscurity thrown over the question by the adoption of the future tense, although it hardly perhaps could have

been avoided. It is literally "Lord, art Thou at this time restoring again the kingdom to Israel?" "Dost Thou mean by the words, „the Spirit is to come upon us not many days hence", that Thou art actually in the progress of the work—that the restoration is now proceeding—that it is to be contemporaneous with the descent of the Spirit?"

Then mark our Lord's answer; for it is an exceedingly instructive one, and one perhaps not enough studied or understood. "*And He said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons;*"—it is not for you to know the ages or the points of time, the periods or the hours,—"*which the Father hath put in his own power.*" What do these words imply? They are not a rejection absolutely of their question, but an answer to it. "I am not now restoring the kingdom to Israel; the moment is not now come. I do not deny that your kingdom will be restored";—in fact, *that* He had taught them throughout, and that the prophecies of the Old Testament had taught them;—"but it will be in the course of the ages, the providentially governed and unrolled ages, of this world, with which you have nothing to do. Your business is with the present days, with your own reception of strength under the Spirit, with the work which I set you to do. Those times and seasons will unfold as the Father sees fit. That event will arrive in its own appointed time; but it is not for you to enquire of it".

Then, "*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you*". "Let it be enough for you to know, that you yourselves will have abundance of strength imparted for your day." Therefore they would receive exactly that which most they wanted: for weakness had been their great characteristic fault; they had wavered in their promises of faithfulness to Him, and they had wavered in courage, and resolution, and everything. You will receive power. Whether you and your people will remain together or not, is another matter. All strength that is wanting will be present to you, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. And what

you will do is this;—not stay here and reign; the kingdom will not be then restored to Israel; but *ye shall be witnesses unto me*. That indeed was their great honour. “With great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”, which was the crowning event of Redemption. And they were to be witnesses respecting Him, not only in Jerusalem, but, as He tells them by and by, to the uttermost parts of the earth. “*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*”

Now in this verse we have a summary or table of contents, briefly expressed, of the whole book before us; and there can be no doubt that it was for this purpose that St. Luke here introduced it:—that he arranged his book according to our Lord’s words, with the design in his mind, of portioning it out accordingly. For let us look at the contents of the book. From the first to the sixth chapter, we have the Church in Jerusalem; the Apostles were witnesses in Jerusalem. Then came the persecution which arose on account of Stephen. This dispersed all except the Apostles, who still remained firm at the helm, notwithstanding the storm that had arisen; this dispersed the preachers of the word, the witnesses to Christ, throughout all Judea and into Samaria, as we learn in the eighth chapter. Samaria was the first point after Judea, just as it is here. Then after that, from the ninth chapter onwards, from the conversion of that remarkable person who was chosen by God to be the instrument of witnessing to Christ among the Gentiles, we have the dispersion to the uttermost parts of the earth; and finally we end at the capital of the world, at the point where then all the empire of the world, and all that was first and foremost in the world, was gathered together, even Rome; we bring the Gospel to Rome, and there the book ends, complete in its arrangement, having followed out in its course the obeying by the first disciples of our Lord’s word.

Now in closing our present exposition, I may just remark one thing, and that is, that we may not perhaps find it so easy as it was in St. John, to conclude each one with a direct practical exhortation. We must be content to go into Scripture, to search the sense and meaning and connection of Scripture, and to derive our practical lessons as we go along. It would only give I think a mere formal and perhaps unmeaning character to the conclusion of an expository lecture of this kind, were I to attempt to go away from the subject which has been before us, and to address you respecting our individual feelings and wants and duties. They spring out of that which we read. Surely, enough spring out of this to-day. Here we have the Lord's remonstrance to his disciples when he was about to leave them; that it was not theirs to look down the stream of time—to busy themselves about others. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me": it is a lesson something like that. Our Lord had prescribed for them their various duties, had told them that those would unfold before them in the course of time, that they should trust in God and be doing his work, and leave Him to work out his own purposes in the course of the history of the world. All this will deepen and lengthen before us as we go on. May God grant to us, in reading of the beginnings of his Church, and of the dispensation of the Spirit, and of the unfolding of the great doctrines of Faith in Christ, each one of us to be established in the faith, to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him."

HOMILY II.

CHAPTER I. 8-11.

I believe that we shall find abundance in these three verses to occupy our attention this afternoon. The event of which they speak holds so important and primary a place with regard to the whole history that is to follow, and the incident which is introduced immediately after these verses so completely begins a new and latter part of the introductory portion of the book, that we had better reserve ourselves to-day for considering the Ascension alone; the circumstances with which it was accompanied, and the import which it holds with regard to the history. It may be necessary, in so doing, to recapitulate somewhat of that which engaged our attention last Sunday. In beginning this book, we found it to be a second discourse of the Evangelist St. Luke; and we saw that he referred back to the former discourse, which contained an account, as he describes it, "of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach". We found it probable that he used that expression, as signifying the the work which Jesus did on earth in the flesh, thereby intimating also his intention of continuing, in the book which he is now beginning, a further work of the same Jesus in his exalted state in heaven by his Spirit. We shall find that impression confirmed as we go on in the book, and confirmed I think especially, by what we are to-day to say respecting the Ascension.

We found St. Luke also referring in very set terms, with regard to the book which he is beginning, to the period

of our Lord's appearance to his disciples between the Resurrection and the Ascension. He tells us, that during those forty days He spoke to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God, and He commanded them that they should wait at Jerusalem for the promise of the Father: and if you remember, I noticed how this account of those forty days has a different aspect from that in the Gospel, in that that constantly looks back, in what our Lord said, upon what He had before said to them, whereas this account looks forward; it is all of "the kingdom of God", and of those things which they were to do, and for which they were to wait. And the Lord's discourse to them ended by telling them, that they should be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence; that that full descent and effusion of the Spirit, resembling that to which the old prophecies had so often likened it, namely the pouring out of water in the ordinance of Baptism, by which proselytes were received into the true faith, should happen to them; that the Spirit should be poured out upon them now very shortly; and that, because his own work was accomplished, the way from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven was now fully established in his Humanity; He had become the channel of grace to men; and the fulness of those words in the end of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel had come, when the heaven was to be opened, and angels, messengers of grace, and God's grace itself, were to be ascending and descending upon the son of man.

That then being the case, we found that the disciples, not so much misunderstanding what our Lord said, as putting themselves too forward with regard to that which He said, then asked of Him, whether He was at that moment restoring the kingdom to Israel; whether what He meant to say was, that in this promise of the Spirit, that which constantly accompanies the promise of the Spirit in the Old Testament, namely, the restoration of Israel, God's people, was to be also brought about. We found that our Lord's answer distinctly referred them to their own duties with regard to this

matter, and to that with which they had alone concern. He told them, that the evolving of the times and seasons and periods of this world was not their matter; that the Father had placed that in his own power; that his own hand ruled over that, and that He would reserve it to Himself; but that strength enough for themselves, in all that they had to do and were concerned with, they should receive, after the Holy Spirit was come upon them; and that they should be (hereby pointing out the line of their duty) his witnesses—witnesses to Him, not only to the lost sheep of Israel, but now they had no prohibition from going into the towns of the Samaritans or into the way of the Gentiles; they were to be his witnesses, first in Jerusalem, then in all Judea, then in Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. And I pointed out to you, if you remember, how exactly these words described the process of the book upon which we had entered; for the Church began its course in Jerusalem; then, by God's providential arrangement in the persecution which arose about Stephen, it was scattered over all Judea, then into Samaria, and then from Samaria into the ends of the earth over all the Gentile nations.

We have now arrived at the point where we stood on leaving off last Sunday, and where we begin to-day. *"When He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight."* Now we may conceive that their minds had been thoroughly prepared for the Ascension, in its prophetic aspect. The Lord had long been speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God; and though we are not permitted to know what it was that He said to them, still we may form a general idea of what it may have been, and we may safely say that the dispensation of the Spirit must have been one great subject upon which the Lord enlightened them; because it was in fact the secret of the kingdom of God which was to be formed upon earth. It was not to be a kingdom coming "with observation"; it was

not to be an outward visible kingdom, at least not as yet; it was to be a kingdom in the hearts of men, working by means of the quiet persuasion of God's Spirit, fulfilling that declaration of the Lord in which he said "When He is come, He will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." And the very outpouring of that Spirit, "the promise of the Father", we may also safely say, I think, must have been connected, as our Lord did connect it in those discourses in St. John, with the immediate and actual withdrawal of his own presence from his disciples. So that we cannot conceive that this event took them altogether by surprise. Our Lord had spoken of "going to the Father" in those discourses which I have mentioned. "A little while, and ye shall not see me". "I go to my Father, and ye see me no more". "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I". "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." All these sayings, even if nothing else was said on the subject, which I can hardly conceive probable, must have made them well aware, that the time had now arrived, when the personal presence of their Master must be entirely withdrawn from them; when even that sort of suspended presence with them, if I may so describe it, which had taken place since the Resurrection, He being seen of them as in visions, every now and then, must come to an end. And so *„when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up."*

Now let us dwell for a few moments on the method of the Ascension. Everything regarding such an event as this is important. We have in the Scripture some instances before this, of miraculous abstractions of men from this present state into the state of glory. We read that Enoch "was not, for God took him." Now there we may conceive (and I suppose we cannot well be wrong in so conceiving) that the words point to a sudden vanishing of that holy

man from among his friends and companions. He "*was not*"; — he was not found. It is a word which is used constantly for the *dead*. You know, that in Scripture Rachel is said to have been "weeping for her children", and to have "refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were not*". And the sons of Jacob, in speaking of their brother Joseph, said "*one is not*". Now we know that Enoch did not die; for the words simply signify absence: he was not there in any manner, he had vanished from the company where he had been accustomed to be seen.

That was one instance. Then there was another in the case of Elijah. Elijah went forth, and as he met one and another of the sons of the prophets, they prophesied that he was to be taken from them that day. He went forth with his chosen disciple and companion, Elisha; and while he talked unto Elisha "a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven".

Here we have two instances of the miraculous abstraction of persons from the flesh to glory. We see how little either of them resembles this. Enoch "*was not*". He had gone no one knew where. It was revealed probably to some, certainly it was revealed to the sacred writer, that God had taken him. Elijah was indeed visibly seen; but there was an important and a great miracle; he was taken up, and he was sought for and could not be found. But our Lord went up visibly and quietly, and as if there had been no miracle, in the sight of those who beheld Him; as if it were a matter of course: so much, indeed, a matter of course, that the word used respecting him in the original language in this narrative, is just the simple word used for a man taking a journey; πορευόμενον αὐτοῦ — he was 'going his way', so to speak. Now is there any reason for this very simple and very quiet and usual method, as it were, of the Lord's ascending? Yes, doubtless there is. It was just nothing but the crowning step of the glorification of his humanity. It was no great leap, so to speak, taken in his majesty or his

glory. He had been, in his life in the flesh, evermore exalting, dignifying, glorifying that humanity which He had taken upon Him, by the performance of his Father's will—by the entire unity of Himself, his human self and his human soul, in all things, with the will of the Father and with the Godhead. It was now brought to its consummation. Indeed, it was brought to its consummation at his victory over death; because the interim was merely a continuance on earth, when He was seen on earth, for the benefit of his church and people. And so there was no sudden withdrawal. There might have been other reasons for that. There might otherwise have been uncertainty about that withdrawal. Some part of the Christian church might have said, "He is gone to the Father"; others might have said, "He has vanished"; just as the Israelites said of Moses, "As for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him". So that there might have been a reason against a sudden and unaccountable withdrawal. But there was no miraculous appearance to terrify; no chariot and horses of fire; simply through the clear summer sky He rose from his disciples, as we learn in the Gospel, with his hands stretched out, blessing them, blessing indeed that world which He left; and He was withdrawn into the sky, a cloud simply receiving Him out of their sight: the further progress of his journey being concealed, for wise reasons, from their searching eyes.

And now let us see what is imported by this event; not merely the propriety of the manner, as outwardly considered, but what is meant by it. The Lord Jesus, in his glorified humanity, has withdrawn from us into heaven. He is in that blessed place of God's immediate presence, where all is according to God's will. His humanity, which is our humanity, has been received into intimate and close and triumphant union with the Father himself. The ordinary language of Scripture, used to suit our weak and imperfect ideas, is, that He "sat down on the right hand of God"; implying by that, in the common vocabulary of kingly precedence, that He has taken that one place of all places, "which

is above every name that is named, in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth". Well, then, He has withdrawn into heaven. Now does not that mere fact shew us at once, that we are not to look, under the present dispensation of the Spirit, for his visible, miraculous, notable agency, in the same way in which it was exercised during his presence on earth, or indeed during that short miraculous time of the infancy of the Church which did not properly belong to the present dispensation, and terminated as soon as the Church was established? We live in a time when Jesus is not seen. We inherit that blessing which He spoke, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed".

Now you may say, "This is common-place, and we all know this". Very true: but I do not think that we follow it out quite as we ought with regard to the spiritual life itself. I think that we are all of us apt to look too much to the evidence of sight;—as it were to stand gazing, with those men of Galilee, into heaven, instead of going about and witnessing for Jesus, and leaving his spiritual work to go on as He is pleased to carry it on. Look at the foundations of the spiritual life. Where are they? Just where the foundations of the natural life are. If you or I were allowed to superintend every beating of our own hearts, if we were allowed to watch over every one of the processes so necessary to the sustentation of our natural life, who could ever live and work in the world? Now just so it is under the dispensation of the Spirit, under which we are living, with regard to the spiritual life. Its foundations are deep: they are not always affected by that which goes on upon the surface. The dejection of the Christian, and the exaltation of the spirits of the Christian, may be compared very much to that which goes on upon the surface of the great deep, when we know that the depths below are unmoved. And even so, we may say, the Lord is carrying on his work in us. How often do we see evidences of this, when great occasions bring it out; the Lord carrying on a

work of which men themselves little know, He from heaven working by his Spirit not only under the face of society, but under the face of the individual character. And what a comfort this is; to think that it is not every unbelieving doubt, not every dejected feeling, which is an index to our real state before God, but that it is "his glory to conceal a matter", and that we shall find that which we want when it is required; that He will in the day of his trial and of his east wind, bring out that strength to stand the tempest, or that strength to take up and bear the cross, which we need. I seem to see some lesson of this kind, though of course it would be fancy to carry it too far, in the circumstance of our Lord's simple, quiet withdrawal to heaven.

His withdrawal, then, was of this sort. And now what was accomplished by it? His humanity was received into this place of triumph; heaven and earth were joined, never to be separated; the great wound of the world was healed; the Spirit was given, through the merits of Christ. It pleased him, indeed, for a period to keep his Church tarrying even then, waiting for the promise; as I said last Sunday, because it is always "good that a man should wait and hope for the salvation of the Lord." But the whole thing is accomplished; and in token of its being accomplished, two heavenly visitants are that instant before the eyes of the Apostles, talking with them, comforting them, sustaining them by a promise as to that same Jesus and his future appearance.

And now let us turn our thoughts to that circumstance. *"While they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel."* We may well imagine them watching the ascending form till it was received into the cloud; watching that cloud till, as we sometimes see in serene weather in summer, the cloud itself vanished into the clear sky; and then, being baffled in their search, they turned their eyes downward again to earth: and they saw standing by them two men in white clothing,

well known to be angelic messengers; and these men said to them, "*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?*" Why, "Ye men of Galilee"? What had this to do with the immediate subject? If we think of the appellation, it will carry to our minds certain associations which I have little doubt it was meant to carry to the minds of those to whom it was uttered. They had sprung from Galilee; they were fishermen of the lake of Galilee, they had their duties and their feelings connected with their former life. Into that life, not indeed exactly the same as it had been at first, but into that life of practical duty—shall I say further, into that life of being "fishers of men"? they were recalled by this appellation. "Go forth upon your work. The Lord called you from your occupation to set you about his occupation; and that is now beginning. Why gaze into heaven?" We were not put upon the earth to gaze up into heaven, even after our Lord himself; but we were put here to do his work. Our religion is not spiritual abstraction; but it is working for Christ, and witnessing for him. Still it is not left alone. We are not unsustained by heavenly promises. That withdrawal into heaven is not for us a matter of despair. We shall see Him: *they* might say, "We shall see him again"; *we* may say, "We shall see him one day". We know that our Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and that in our flesh these eyes shall behold Him. And in accordance with this was the promise which these heavenly messengers were commissioned to utter, "*This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go*"—the same simple word again—as ye have seen him proceed, "*into heaven*". "THIS SAME Jesus". "You need not be afraid that that humanity, with which you have been so long conversant, shall be put off again; He never will divest himself of it. He sits as a merciful and gracious High Priest, with those same wounds which He received in the house of his friends;

with those same looks of mercy and of grace, to which you have been so accustomed; and with these He will come again. He will be THE SAME JESUS. And is not this a comfort for us, that we shall not have in that day to stand and face some unusual, some terrible sight, some dreadful Judge whom we shall fear? We all know what it is to see some awful change come over the face of an accustomed and familiar friend: we know how much more dreadful it is than seeing a stranger, however terrible he might look. We need dread no such change in that Saviour, with whom we have been so long familiar in the Gospel, and whom we have so long learned to love. It will be THE SAME JESUS.

Well, then, He will return "IN LIKE MANNER" as they saw him go. Of course we are not to press these words too closely. We are not to press them, I mean, so closely as this—as to suppose that He will come singly and alone; that He will come descending merely in the same simple, quiet, and, if we may so speak, unobtrusive manner as He withdrew himself: because we very well know that this will not be so; that He will come with glory; that He will come with his saints and his angels. But it means, that He will come visibly, come personally, as man, from heaven, even as He went up personally, as man, into heaven. And it is that coming, to which the Church of Christ looks forward. The world scorns it; and with the unbelieving portion of the Church,—more or less unbelieving,—it is also a subject of scoffing; but with the Christian it is a sacred hope, it is reality, and it is life. He looks forward to it as a thing in which he rejoices and for which he longs. He hopes and waits for the appearing of Christ. Seeing that we know, by our Lord's own words, that the day and the hour of his re-appearing were revealed to none, in the early Church we very often find, in the personal declarations of the Apostles, a feeling as if they thought that this day was very close upon them: and indeed it has been God's wisdom to nourish that feeling evermore in all ages of his Church.

It may be to-night: we know not when it will be. "Watch; for ye know neither the day nor the hour". But however long it may be, it is the promise of the new Covenant. It is as much the promise of the new Covenant, as "the seed of the woman" was the promise of the old Covenant, and as the Father's promise of the Spirit was the promise of that intermediate time, when men's eyes were looking for something from their risen and their ascended Saviour.

We will not further speak now upon this coming of the Lord. It is a very fertile subject both for preaching and for meditation; and I hope that the minds of all Christians here present are continually directed towards it; not in the spirit of fanciful calculation, but in the spirit of humble and earnest hope; for it is, indeed, of all comforts, the greatest of our comforts, to know, that we shall see Him,—to know, that we shall be like Him,—to know that we shall ourselves enter into absolute society and intercourse with Him, of whom we have heard so much, and whom we desire more and more to love and to be like. But we will say, and will just trace it for the few minutes that remain to us, that this incident of which we have now read, forms, so to speak, the standing-point of the Acts of the Apostles. The Lord has withdrawn into heaven. His agency is going on there; but it is evermore *his* agency. Now just let us take a little pains (for it will be well worth our while) to trace this fact in the book, and to see how the Evangelist sets it continually before us. The first incident that we shall have to deal with will be, the filling up of the vacancy in the number of the Apostles occasioned by the falling of the traitor from his place. There we find at once, that the minds of the Apostles are directed to their ascended Lord. There can be no doubt about it, because He chose his Apostles; he said "Have not I chosen you twelve"? They pray to Him, and they beg of Him that he will "shew whether of these two He has chosen". It was his agency from heaven, at once recognized, that filled up

the vacancy among the Apostles, and chose Matthias into the place of Judas.

Then, 'again, the great event of the second chapter, which established the dispensation of the Spirit, is distinctly described as being the doing of the risen and ascended Lord. In the 33rd verse it is said, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, ~~he~~ hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." In the 47th verse, again, we have, "The Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved." The furtherance of the Church, the multiplying of its numbers, was the doing of the ascended Lord.

Then, again, we come, in the beginning of the third chapter, to the working of miracles. There also, the same agency is perceived. "Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." And in the discourses and apologies of St. Peter and St. John before the authorities of the Jews with reference to that miracle, we find it distinctly stated, that it was wrought by the agency of Jesus. "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by ~~him~~ doth this man stand here before you whole." And so you may follow out the rest of the miracles in the book, and you will find that they are all ascribed to the agency of the Lord Jesus. He was not withdrawn from his apostles in working, though He was withdrawn in person.

We have Jesus also appearing during this book, several times. When the first martyr, St. Stephen, he who headed that noble army of martyrs which suffered for Christ, stood forth to his confession, the Lord Jesus appeared to him: he saw "the heavens opened", and he saw Jesus "standing on the right hand of God"; as it has been strikingly said, having risen up for his protection; standing to assure him, to give him hope, and to assure also all that should suffer

for Him. Then again we have Him appearing on another occasion, when it was his will to turn that remarkable person whom he had been for so many years preparing for his special work, from being a persecutor, to be an apostle. He saw Him; and He said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest". And it was Jesus who sent him on his mission to the Gentiles, and to the ends of the earth. On another occasion, when that same apostle Paul was in trouble and with dangers thick gathering around him, He appeared to him, and said, "Be of good cheer: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome".

We have Jesus also, by his angels, acting in this book continually. We have Him referred to again and again, when the divine agency is spoken of, when prayer is made, when ministrations are offered. All through the book the Lord Jesus, acting from heaven, acting by his Spirit and by his messengers, is the central subject; thus justifying the description which we gave last Sunday of the book, that in fact "The acts of the apostles", which has been the title given to it, apparently independently of the book itself, is an inadequate title, as it is not so much the acts of the apostles, seeing that though some are detailed in it, they are those of only one or two, and that it would be better described as the working of the ascended Jesus—with regard to the establishment of the Church of Christ, the finishing of his agency which was begun in the Gospel.

Then we may ask ourselves, brethren, what is our lesson from that which we have gone through to-day? for this time, though it may not be always so in treating of the Acts, it is a very plain and a very positive one. We stand exactly where the apostles stood when their Lord was taken from them. We stand, each one of us, with his work lying before us. His vows are upon us; we are his witnesses. And O! how much this implies in every man's case. We are members of families; we are members of society; we have

the care of our own spiritual life. In all these cases, we have the Lord's work to do. We do not see Him; we cannot go to Him and consult Him personally; He has withdrawn from us into heaven. But his work is just as much going on in our circles and in our souls as it ever could be going on were He personally present. He is acting by his Spirit upon all those who seek for his Spirit, and upon all in whom his Spirit dwells. Our lesson is, then, to go our way, rejoicing to return, as the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" even after their chief joy was withdrawn from them, each one to our duties in life; looking unto Jesus"; knowing that we have a powerful advocate at the throne of God, that though we are weak, He is strong, that though we are insufficient for the things which lie upon us, He is sufficient for them all, and that his grace will be given to us in sufficient measure; praying evermore; seeking more and more for the teaching and for the strengthening of his Spirit, that we may "glorify Him on earth", and "finish the work which He has given us to do."

HOMILY III.

CHAPTER I. 12—26.

This incident, which we have now read, cannot be called the beginning of the history of the Acts properly speaking, but it is the end of the introduction to that history. The history itself begins with the descent of the Spirit upon the Church. That was the opening of the new dispensation in its perfectness. We have as yet the Church preparing for that great event; and the incident which we have now read was a concluding preparation.

But let us first notice the circumstances with which our narrative begins. The Apostles had just seen the Lord ascend up into heaven. They were now left, consoled by the promise which the heavenly messengers had given them, but acting under his immediate command which He had uttered to them but a few minutes before; "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high". So they went back to Jerusalem, and they returned "from the mount called Olivet". It appears, then, that our Lord ascended into heaven from that hill, to the east of Jerusalem. It might at first sight seem as if there were here a difference from the account in the Gospel of St. Luke; for there he relates, "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven". Now Bethany, the actual village of Bethany, lay on the other side of the Mount of

Olives from Jerusalem: so that, probably, this latter account in the Acts is just simply a greater particularizing of the spot where it took place; for it is very possible that the district of Bethany—as we should say familiarly in our own days, the Parish—extended over the mountain, and that the spot to which our Lord led the disciples was in that district or division; and so it was true, in a wider sense of the words, that “he led them out as far as to Bethany”. There may have been a reason for inserting this here, which will come before us in speaking of the next words:—“from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey”. Why should this be mentioned? One of the best of the ancient commentators, namely Chrysostom, has I think very likely struck on the probable cause why it is mentioned. He says that there is reason to suppose that the Ascension took place on the sabbath, and that there may have been fault found,—as we know how strong and how particular the Jewish believers were on all those points, and we know the controversies that were raised during this book of the Acts, of which the narrative treats—there may have been offence given by the apparent circumstance that our Lord went out from Jerusalem, and that the disciples came back to Jerusalem a longer distance than was generally allowed for what was called “a sabbath day’s journey.” At all events the conjecture is shrewd and sensible, and it may be the true one; it may be for this cause that St. Luke here inserts the actual spot, that it was the hill called Olivet, and that it was at a distance on that hill within an ordinary sabbath day’s journey; that is, within about six furlongs of our distance.

Now in reading this part of the account, our thoughts will naturally rest somewhat on the spot which the Lord chose for his leaving this earth and returning to his Father. It was a spot hallowed by many associations. It had likewise a prophetic interest. In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, in the 11th chapter and the 23rd verse, where he

is giving an account of the glory of the Lord leaving the rebellious city of Jerusalem, he says, "The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city", which is the Mount of Olives. Again, in the book of the prophet Zechariah, where, you remember, a prophecy occurs respecting the judgment of the latter days,—the great victory of the Lord in these latter days,—in the 14th chapter and the 4th verse he says, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west". So that there were various prophetic associations relating to the mount of Olives, which, though they might be to them, as they are to us yet, somewhat obscure, were still dwelling around it.

There were likewise historical associations of an interesting kind, and of a kind somewhat connected with that which had passed respecting our Lord. In the second book of Samuel, the 15th chapter and the 30th verse, in the midst of the account of David's being driven from his throne by his son and by his traitorous minister Ahithophel, (of whom we shall have more to say by and by in the part respecting Judas) we read thus:—"And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up". If that procession occurred to the disciples at this time, and if they mixed the memory of it with that sad night of agony which our Lord spent on the side, near the foot, of the same hill, they would, as they returned to Jerusalem, have their minds full of the joy which had now superseded the sorrow that had gone before. The son of David had now triumphed, though his predecessor David, in anticipation of this great event, had been driven from his kingdom with weeping and with lamentation: and though he himself had fulfilled more than human sorrow on

that spot, he had now gone up to God, and sanctified it for ever as a scene of triumph in the eyes of his disciples.

They returned, then, to Jerusalem. "*And, when they were come in, that is into the city, they went up into the upper room*"; the upper room namely, where they had before assembled; probably the room where our Lord had instituted the Lord's Supper; at all events, the room where they had been in the habit of assembling since his resurrection; and where He had appeared to them; for so the familiar denomination, "*the upper room*" seems to designate. "They went up into the upper room, where they were in the habit of abiding". That, perhaps, is the better way of rendering the words; not, "*where abode both Peter*", and so on; because it would seem as if those disciples were there abiding, and they had joined them there; whereas these were the very persons who had come. So that I would give it thus:—"they went up into the upper room, where they were in the habit of abiding, namely, Peter, and James, and John", and the rest.

Now we have here a distinct enumeration of the eleven apostles; shewing that the mind of the Evangelist does thrust them before us formally and determinately, as having very much to do with that which he had to write: and, indeed, the whole narrative which we have to-day read, testifies to the same view of the subject. They are brought before us in prominent relief. It becomes necessary to fill up their number. There is something regarding them, different from anything that regards the rest of the church. So he gives us their names. They are the old names, to which we have been accustomed from the Gospels, almost in the same order, with one notable vacancy, the place, namely, from which one of them had "by transgression fallen", and which now remained to be filled up. I need not dwell upon the names or the order of the Apostles, further than to mention that we find Peter, James, and John occupying the first place as usual. *That* James, we know, was very soon taken away

by martyrdom—the first of the apostles : and Peter and John, who are so closely brought together in the beginning of the Acts, appear to have been fast and close friends, and to have gone together in almost every particular in the foundation of the early infant church. Judas, the last mentioned of the apostles here, is called, as we have it filled up, “the brother of James”; and probably that filling up is right; but it is indefinite in the original, “Judas, belonging to James”. Sometimes an ellipsis of this kind signifies *the son*; sometimes it might signify the *husband*, or, in the case of a woman, as it fits in and squares with the context, the *wife*: it must be filled up according to circumstances.

“*All these*”, we read then, “*were continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*” Let us first take the persons mentioned; and then we have a few words to say on their occupation. There were with them women; in all probability the women so often mentioned and alluded to in the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of St. Luke, where we read that there were women who had come up with Jesus from Galilee, who had “ministered to him of their substance”: and some of them are mentioned by name; three of them at least we know; one, Mary Magdalene; another, Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward; and another, Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee. How many they were, we cannot say. They had been eminent in their love to our Lord at a time when all the other disciples had forsaken him and fled. They had been likewise distinguished for the care with which they had come to pay the last offices to his sacred body. And now we find them sharing the triumph of his disciples, and meeting together to pray to and to supplicate Him.

There is another interesting person here; the more interesting, because it is the last mention we have of her in the scripture record; “*Mary, the mother of Jesus*”. It is at least delightful to us to know that she continued, to the

moment that we hear of her, faithful in her belief in her divine Son. She began with faith, and the last we hear of her is faith. And this confirms the character I have always been anxious to impress upon you of this holy woman, that she was a simple devout Christian believer, her heart "rejoicing in God her saviour", as she herself expressed it in the moment of her exultation. What is afterwards related of her in early tradition, before any of the foolish fables arose respecting her, with which you are all, alas, too familiar, varies considerably, and is hardly trustworthy. Some say that she died at the age of fifty-nine, having accompanied John to Ephesus, and that she was buried there. This, of course, is very probable. She was entrusted particularly to the care of the Evangelist and Apostle St. John; he, we have every reason to believe, did live and preach, and rule the Church, at Ephesus, for a long period; and this, I suppose, is the most likely idea that we should form of her after-course; and it may be for that very reason, that the traditional early Church history has thus shaped it. The fable of the Roman Catholic Church, respecting her being taken up miraculously into heaven, which they call "the Assumption", has not the slightest vestige of a foundation, even in tradition itself. It is a thing totally unknown to all the early ages of the Church; and while we find many traditions untrustworthy, and containing in them foolish things, we do not find any trace of this whatever; it is entirely an invention of later ages.

We also have enumerated here "*his brethren*". Here again is an interesting point. There is every reason to believe, I think—but I may fairly tell you that it is matter of difference among Christians even to this day—there is every reason to believe, in my view of the subject, that our Lord was not only officially, but naturally, "the first-born among many brethren"; that the persons who are spoken of as the brethren of our Lord were really the younger sons of Joseph and Mary. There are several reasons for concluding

this. One of the most forcible of those reasons may be found in the beginning of the seventh chapter of St. John. In the last verses of the sixth chapter, we have our Lord saying, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil"? alluding to Judas; so that this imports, that the twelve apostles had been chosen before that time. Then in the beginning of the seventh chapter, which goes on regularly with the narrative, we read, our Lord having declined to go up to the feast of Jerusalem, and shew himself there, at the solicitation of his brethren, "For neither did his brethren believe in Him". Now it is hardly probable, that at that very time some of his brethren should have been of the number of the twelve apostles. If not, then those persons of the same name as they, James, Simon, and so on, who appear among the twelve, were not the brethren of our Lord, but only more distant relatives, and his brethren according to the flesh did not then believe in Him, but were converted to that belief afterwards; when, we cannot say. However that may be, there were at this time certain persons, distinct from the rest of the Apostles, but still eminent, and so eminent as to be especially mentioned, called the brethren of the Lord. St. Paul alludes to them again, in the ninth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where, in speaking of the liberty that he had as an apostle to live upon the churches, and to expend, in his going about and his journeyings for the Gospel, the money of the believers which was contributed to him, he says, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas"?

We have then before us the persons who were gathered together ordinarily in that upper chamber; and we read that they "*continued with one accord in prayer and in supplication*". Now this is an interesting and important lesson to us. They were waiting for the performance of the divine promise. The performance of that promise was as certain a fact in the future, as anything could possibly be. It was

not a fact left dependent upon their prayer and supplication. Our Lord did not say to them, 'If ye strive for it and wrestle for it in prayer, I will send the Holy Spirit upon you'; but he positively told them, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence". "I send the promise of my Father upon you: tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high". So that they were not striving to obtain the performance of this promise, but they were living in the attitude of prayer and supplication. And is not there likewise a reason for this? Some people say, "Why pray and strive for things which we know God will grant to them that believe in him and trust him"? And here might be one answer;—there are many others, many sufficient ones;—but here might be one answer; that the early church, when the sound of the Lord's words was still in their ears, so to speak, when his promise was certain, that it would be performed after a few days, yet abode in prayer and supplication with one accord.

We may venture to conjecture the subjects on which they prayed and supplicated. Doubtless it must have been, that they might be filled with the Holy Spirit; that they might do nothing which should prevent his coming upon each of them; that they might not put a bar against his gracious influence by their own unworthiness and sinfulness. We may conceive, during this period, how St. Peter prayed that his faith might not again fail. We may conceive how they all prayed, who had in the hour of weakness forsaken the Lord and fled; and how in the prospect of the high office and duty before them, they all supplicated Him who is the fountain of strength, to fill them with that power of which he had spoken.

But one thing remained yet to be done, before they were complete, in waiting for their Lord's promise, and entering upon the office that he had pointed out before them: one thing, which we may perhaps fairly say was suggested

and revealed to the Apostle who proposed it, specially, by the Holy Ghost; for he evidently speaks in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he interprets Scripture in an authoritative way, totally unknown to the Apostles up to the day when he spoke. The number of the Apostles themselves had not been chosen by our Lord without a reason. He himself, here and there, hints at that reason: he tells them, as at the end of the nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew, when Peter put the question to him, "We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel". So that there seems to have been (and this has been the view of almost all who have treated this subject) a purposed adaptation, on the part of our Lord, of the leaders, the patriarchs, so to speak, of the Christian Church, to the number of those leaders and patriarchs of Israel of olden time, from whom the twelve tribes were called. And we see this even more strikingly still in the prophetic book of the Revelation, where, in the account of that great multitude whom no man can number, who shall rejoice before the throne in the last days, we read of the servants of God being sealed to the number of "an hundred and forty and four thousand", and those are called after the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. So that there was an impropriety in the fact of there being a vacancy in this somewhat sacred number;—because it had been chosen by our Lord himself, and alluded to in these terms; and it was desirable that the number should be filled up again; that they should be complete, in the work which they had to go forth to do with regard to the people of Israel; for that was the first object of their apostolic labour.

We read then, "*In those days*",—during those ten days,—"*Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said,*

(*the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty*.) We have now come before a fresh assembly. We are not now any longer in the presence merely of the apostles and the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren; but we are in the presence of 120 persons, who are called "the disciples". Now these were evidently not all the disciples; because the Lord had appeared to "more than five hundred brethren at once", probably in Galilee; but these may be fairly assumed to have been the number of the Church in Jerusalem at that time:—of those who were remaining, it being no particular season at this time of which we are now speaking; of those who dwelt ordinarily in Jerusalem. That the number was so small as this, need excite no astonishment; because by far the greater number of the disciples of our Lord were Galileans. There the greater part of his ministry had been spent, and there He would have the larger number of adherents. But such was the number of the Jerusalem believers. We shall see a reason by and by why this expression, "the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty", is used. "Peter stood up and said, *Men* and brethren". It is merely, "Brethren"—"Men, brethren". The words do not import that there was one class men, and another class brethren, as their junction together by the conjunction would seem to imply in our language; but it is merely, "Men, who are my brethren"; as we should say in English, "Brethren." "*This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus*". Doubtless the minds of some of the believers had been somewhat shaken, or at all events brought into questioning, by finding this vacant place,—and seeing, that one of those who had been most trusted by the Lord, who had accompanied him through the greater part of his tribulations and his ministry, should have thus withdrawn from his place, and that that place was not supplied. It was a blank in the

minds of the believers. St. Peter, now standing up before them, gives them the reason why this must have been so, and he gives it out of Scripture: and it is worth while noticing, that in this his act evidently of preeminence among the apostles, and evidently of a certain kind of authority which he has in the beginning of the Acts, but which wanes and vanishes out afterwards, he does not assert anything as of his own authority, but brings everything to the test of Scripture. The first act of the Church, by her first superintendent Minister, was an appeal to the text of Scripture. Let that never be forgotten. Would that every appeal, by every one of her ministers since, had been an appeal equally direct and equally justified!

He tells them, then, that *"this scripture must needs have been fulfilled."* Now notice this language, from persons who but a short time ago were entirely in doubt as to the whole meaning of Scripture; knew not what the resurrection from the dead was; knew not the language even of that beautiful and plain and simple chapter, which we have read together this afternoon, the 53rd of Isaiah, respecting the sufferings of the Messiah. Several reasons may be given why the apostles should be now enlightened, whereas they were so dark before. Our Lord had been, we know, during those forty days, discoursing to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God; and we also know that part of this had been, "opening their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures." He had given them an insight into the prophetic books of scripture, which they had never before possessed. They had before very likely imagined, as I am sorry to say many amongst us imagine now, that those prophetic declarations in the book of the Psalms, two of which St. Peter is about now to quote, were mere ill-natured outbreaks of the wrath of David against some of his personal enemies; they had thought them uncharitable as they stood, and they had had no idea that they had farther reference. But our Lord had taught them more than

this; he had taught them to see in David everywhere David's Son and David's Lord; he had taught them to believe that every thing in those Psalms which spoke of persecution, and enmity, and sufferings, and sin, applied to the persecution and the enmity that should be raised against, and the sufferings and the sins taken upon Him by, the future Deliverer of Israel. And that is the spirit in which the whole book of the Psalms is treated of in the New Testament; and no Christian, who sees and knows this, is ever astonished to hear any portion of that book quoted, however directly and without any apology or explanation, as referring to our Lord, and to those things which belong to him.

Now this verse is taken out of the 69th Psalm; that Psalm which likewise has a direct reference to many of the sufferings of the Lord; the Psalm which contains the words, "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink". The words run thus in our Bible version;—I will allude to them as they occur in the 20th verse of the chapter before us by and by, but I am thus alluding to them because St. Peter quotes them here;—"*Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents*". St. Peter alludes to the circumstance that the place which Judas had occupied among the Apostles was at this moment desolate, and that none belonging to him, neither he himself nor any of his posterity, dwelt in it or inhabited it but that it was to be filled up from elsewhere. He also alludes to another passage; "*and, His bishoprick*", or his office, "*let another take*". The words in the 20th verse are not to be read straight on; "*Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and his bishoprick let another take*"; for they do not occur in the same Psalm; one portion occurs in the 69th Psalm, and the other in the 109th Psalm. A pause then should be made in reading them after the word "*and*";—"*and, His bishoprick let another take*". The 109th Psalm is also one respecting the persecutions, the faithlessness and enmity excited against David, and a greater than David, even

the Son of David himself; and there the same words occur, "His office let another take".

These words, then, St. Peter says, "*must needs have been fulfilled*"; and he states that the Holy Ghost spake them by the mouth of David concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. Now this is a very important assertion: as it were, a key to prophetic Psalms of this kind.

David himself did not speak them concerning Judas; because it would be unreasonable to suppose that he had any such view when he uttered them. What degree of insight he had into their being prophetic words, we cannot say. Sometimes, no doubt, that insight was complete; because sometimes he himself declares that he is speaking of that which is his hope, and his expectation, and his joy. Still, this assertion is not committed to the fact of *his knowing*, that the Holy Ghost spake the words concerning Judas, when He spake them by the mouth of David. The intent of God's Holy Spirit, when he inspired David to utter those words, was to point out him, who should betray the Lord of life; a good guide to us in our study of passages which point onwards to subjects in the Christian dispensation and history.

There is a term used in describing Judas here which it is worth while to notice;—he "*was guide to them that took Jesus*". Sometimes we are apt to question in our minds, how it was that he betrayed Him. You may say, that at any time they might have taken Him, that there seems to have been no definite result involved in Judas's going and saying that he would betray Him to the chief priests and elders. But what he did was this; he guided them that took Him into a place of privacy, where he knew that Jesus was. They dared not take Him in the face of the people; they did not know his usual haunts and resorts, or at all events they were not certain of Jesus at certain times, and they wished not to excite any attention. If they had searched for Him by means of their police, they would have provoked

an uproar on the part of the people, and the safe capture would have become impossible. Judas pointed out to them the place where he knew that the Lord would be at a certain time of privacy, and might be taken without provoking enquiry; he *"was guide to them that took Jesus"*. In this consisted, in matter of fact, the betrayal.

Then, *"For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry"*: or, "He was numbered amongst us, and he had allotted to him the lot of this our ministry". The passage is remarkable as "the lot" is expressed by the word *κληρος*, from whence is derived our "clergy", our word "clerical", and the whole family of words applied to the Ministers of the Gospel; thereby meaning, the *lot* or *portion* of the ministry. Judas had that put upon him by the Lord; the Lord chose out the Twelve. There may have been, and doubtless there were, grave reasons, too deep by far for us to enter into, why He, knowing all things, chose Judas to be an apostle; but we may safely say that one reason was to teach us, even in the highest places of spiritual preeminence, to tremble and fear for our own unworthiness.

This man, then, was numbered among the Apostles; and St. Peter now goes on to give the history of his terrible end. *"This man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood"*. Now let us at once put this (because it is of no use in our expositions ever to evade a thing of this kind) together with the account in St. Matthew. In the 27th chapter of St. Matthew we read thus; that when our Lord was condemned by the Council and taken before Pontius Pilate the governor, "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.

And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day". Now it may be said, and at first sight it may fairly be said, that these two accounts are considerably different the one from the other. In the one, we have Judas bringing back the money, the price of our Lord's betrayal, to the Chief Priests, and casting it down in the temple; they take counsel what to do with it, and buy a field; and because it is bought with the price of blood, they call it "the field of blood". *Here* we have it, that *Judas himself* bought the field with the reward of iniquity, and that it was called "the field of blood" *on account of his own terrible end*, which took place apparently, by the narrative (for so the narrative seems to assume), on the spot. Well, certainly, as I say, at first sight those two accounts do considerably differ. How, then, you will say, will you reconcile them? I answer, It is not my business to reconcile them. I believe both of them to be thoroughly and strictly true, in every word which is uttered in them. I believe that they both represent the same event, from different sides of sight; just as two persons relating the same thing without any concert with one another will bring out, one one part of the circumstance, the other another part. We may easily conceive how both these things may have taken place:—mind, I do not mean for a moment to say that it was so, or to offer it as a certain and perfect explanation, but merely as a possible one. Suppose that Judas had intended to buy the field, but had not bought it in fact; that he had made the purchase, but had not paid the purchase money; that he had then come and cast down the money in the temple in his remorse;

that the chief Priests and Pharisees, deliberating what to do with it, had become aware of the circumstances, and had completed the purchase; there would be nothing very improbable in this. I do not mean to say that it was so, but it is very possible. Then again, as to his end, there is likewise a difference of account here; but it is one which confirms the independence and the veracity of those who give the account. In the one case it is said, that he "went and hanged himself"; the word not necessarily, by the bye, meaning exactly what we call hanging; it merely implies strangulation. The later writing gives another and more terrible incident; but does not specify whether it happened, while he was alive, or after his death: and so is not at all inconsistent with the other. So that in fact this, like all other of these so called discrepancies in the sacred history, just establishes this fact,—and really it is a very important one indeed,—that the accounts are given to us independently by true and honest men, representing, as in St. Luke's case, what they heard on good authority, the Spirit guiding them to receive it as authentic:—in St. Matthew's case, that which he knew from his own knowledge, as having been one mixed up in the circumstances. The circumstance of minute difference gives us just additional evidence to the truth of their statements. If we had found every thing exactly, as we say, cut and dried, and put into the same form, we should have concluded that there had been concert between the various sacred historians, and that they had so put things, on purpose that there might seem to be no discrepancy between them. Now, we take them exactly as we find the narratives, as the testimony of credible witnesses, who have not had any collusion with one another.

The fact then was so. Where the field exactly lay, we are not told: but St. Jerome, who lived in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem a little more than three hundred years after this, in the convent of Bethlehem, relates to us, that there was a field of potter's clay, which was worked in

his day, on the south side of Mount Zion; and in all probability, it was the same.

Then St. Peter goes on, and quotes the passages from the book of Psalms which I anticipated in order to make complete the point of the fulfilment of prophecy. And he says afterwards, "*Wherefore of these men which have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection*". These are two very interesting verses, because they set forth all the necessary qualifications for a man to be chosen among the apostles; viz: that he must have seen the whole of the Lord's official course. They were to be witnesses respecting facts. Our Lord said to them, that the Holy Ghost, when he came, should bring to their minds all that He had spoken unto them; and if all that He had spoken unto them, doubtless also, as concomitant with it, all that He had done; his miracles, as well as his parables and discourses. They were to be complete witnesses; and the result of their complete testimony we have in the writings of our four Evangelists. They, it is true, were not all apostles. Two of them were themselves apostles. The evidence of St. Mark, in all probability, rests on the testimony of an apostle himself, who hardly can be other, from circumstances in his Gospel, than St. Peter. The testimony of St. Luke, as he himself implies in his preface, was carefully drawn up from the evidence of those who were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word. So that in this testimony of the apostles, this bearing witness to the Resurrection as the crowning fact, and to the rest of our Lord's life as belonging to the scheme of Redemption, consist the sacred record, and in fact the belief of every Christian at this day. They therefore played a most important part in the foundation of the Church of Christ. They were the depositors of that everlasting and infallible word of truth—both the depositaries, and the depositors, of it; they had it

deposited in them, and they deposited it for our benefit in the Scriptures, which have ever rested the most precious possession of the Church of Christ. So that, as you see here, we have no personal qualities mentioned; those were for the Lord to judge of; but we have the fact of having been a constant accompanier of the Lord from the first moment of his official life, the baptism of John, down to the day when He was taken up from them. "*To be a witness with us of his resurrection*". It seems that that was regarded, and indeed it was justly regarded, as the crowning fact of all. St. Paul looks upon it as such; for he says, as you know, in the great chapter, the fifteenth of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins". For that was the redeeming of the pledge; that was the tearing of the seal from the bond, and the letting him that was bound go free; it was the approval of our Redeemer as the Conqueror of death, and the bringing in of life for the race of man. And we find in consequence, that shortly after, in a chapter soon coming, we read, "With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

These words, as you see, were addressed to the *whole Church*; and that, again, is a notable point. St. Peter does not, by authority of his own or of the eleven apostles, point out the man who should be chosen to this high office; he says to them, that one must be chosen. "*And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus*", of whom we know nothing whatever except the mention of him in this case,—of course he fulfilled these conditions,—"*and Matthias*". It is said by tradition, (but it is very easy for anybody to say it, now or at any other time) that these were of the number of the seventy disciples. Most probably it was so; because those persons whom the Lord had chosen to send out two and two, to make up, or supplement, the number of the apostles in their first missionary journey, would naturally be those chosen to fill this high office.

"And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place". In the first place, to whom are these words addressed? There hardly can be a doubt, I think, that they are addressed to the risen and ascended Saviour. There hardly can be a doubt, because of his own words, "Did not I choose you twelve"? It was His office, to choose his own apostles. And though it may of course be said, in a secondary and a higher sense, that the words may very well have been addressed to the Father, from whom every such choice, from the counsel of his will, would proceed, yet still it would be far more probable, in their simplicity, knowing, as we do, that they had worshipped the Lord after his Ascension, that these words would be addressed to HIM. There is another little circumstance too. They were uttered in all probability by St. Peter: he was the spokesman before, and very likely he was so now too. What had been one of his last words to his Saviour? "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee". "Thou knowest my heart". And the words here are, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men." I own that these two points are very strong to induce us to think that this is a direct prayer, the first public prayer of the Church, to the ascended Saviour in heaven. However, it is not declared that it is so; nor is there anything in the wording of it making this beyond all possible doubt: so that it hardly, perhaps, can be wisely or fairly used in controversy with the Socinians on this matter, whatever our own persuasion and opinion respecting it may be. I think all of us will be fully persuaded, that it was thus addressed to Christ.

Here is an expression that is somewhat difficult—*"from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place"*. Some have not even joined these latter words with Judas at all, but they have taken them in this way:—"Shew whether

of these two Thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, in order that he whom Thou hast chosen may go to his own place"—to his own appointed place among the apostles. But that is very improbable; it is hardly possible, indeed, that it can be so taken. Well, then, if not, what are the words to mean regarding Judas? I conceive that they have a double meaning. Judas had left a place which God had appointed him: he had left his apostleship and ministry; he had bought a field with the reward of his iniquity; he had gone there to take possession of it; and conviction had come upon him there, and there he had perished. There may be a slight allusion to that circumstance: but beyond all doubt there is a darker and sadder one behind, and the words do mean that which occurs to the mind of every Christian on reading them:—that he might go to his own appointed place in that kingdom of darkness,—of which he chose to be a denizen, rather than of God's Kingdom; that he who had deserted God's place which He had appointed him, might fall into his own place, which is appointed for those who are traitors to God and forsakers of Him.

Well then, *"they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles; he was voted into the number of the eleven apostles.* It is not merely as a matter of course; that from thenceforth they spoke of him as an apostle; but the word is a formal word:—they took proceedings, the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was elected with the eleven apostles; that is to say, after that the multitude of the Church had chosen him, by means of the Lord pointing him out by the lot, he was then voted into the number of the apostles. Now in doing this, they proceeded strictly in accordance (the Church being the spiritual Israel) with the way in which the inheritance of promise was allotted among the children of Israel. If you look in the 26th chapter of the book of Numbers and the 52nd and following verses, you have this:—"The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Unto these the

land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names". "The number of names was about an hundred and twenty". There is a striking coincidence even in a small point. "To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance", and so on. "Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few".

So then we have, brethren, in the words before us, the last preparatory act of the waiting Church before the dispensation of the Spirit broke upon them in all its glory. Next time, please God, we shall treat of that event, which was the beginning of all Church history, and of all Christian life, properly so called. Hitherto, the Church of Christ had been suspended upon promises; had been looking on into the future for its own spiritual life. From that time forward, it had dwelling in it Him who was the Comforter, instead of a present Lord, who had departed from it; Him who came from the Father and the Son, even the Spirit of truth. May we also wait for his coming, as they waited for it, and pray and supplicate God, that he will give us more and more of his influence, which He is as ready to do now as he was then, and it is as certain now, as it ever could be then, that to none of them who ask him, will He refuse his Holy Spirit.

HOMILY IV.

CHAPTER II. 1—4.

Short as is this portion which I have read of the second chapter, it will be far more than we shall be able this day to go through in our exposition. The event to which it relates is of such vast importance, and holds such a primary place in the history of the Apostolic Church, that it will be necessary to speak somewhat at length of it, before we can enter into those details wherewith the happening of it was accompanied. And besides that, we must look back a little upon our last portion. The narrative there, of the election of another into the room of the traitor Judas among the twelve apostles, occupied us so long last Sunday, that I was obliged to omit two points, which seem to belong to it, and which will be no inapt introduction to that of which we have to speak to-day. The one of them was, to deal with a view of that incident which has often been taken, which has recently been taken with some ability,* that it was a *mistake*, to elect another into the place of Judas, and that our Lord in fact shewed his own will on the matter, in the special call of him, whose Conversion we this day commemorate, namely St. Paul. At first sight, perhaps, that might appear to some a specious view. I cannot even give it so much weight as that; for it is evident from the whole narrative, that the Church was acting by

* By Dr. Stier, in his *Reden der Apostel*.

the power of the Spirit, then partially indeed, but still truly dwelling in it,—and acting at the immediate prompting of the Lord himself. The matter is solemnly referred to Him by prayer; the lots are cast forth; the lot falls upon Matthias; Matthias is voted in with the eleven apostles. Is it possible, that the Evangelist St. Luke, writing under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God, or if you choose even to descend for a moment for the sake of argument to lower ground than that, and say,—carefully recording every event that happened in the Church for the future ages of that Church,—should have let pass without remark so great a mistake as this would have been in the Church,—the endeavouring to fill up, presumptuously, we may say, and before the time, a vacancy which the Lord himself afterwards filled otherwise? We cannot, I think, for one moment give countenance to such an idea, but must regard the event which is related in the end of that first chapter, as one in the direct course of the providence of the great Head of the Church, specially designed, and specially related, in order to teach us what was his will respecting it.

That was one of the topics; and the other was, to have said a few words to you respecting the apostolic office in general. It seemed the most apt place for doing so, at the very time when the importance of that office was shewn, by the special filling up of a vacancy in it, before the descent of the Spirit. Now the immediate office of the apostles is given us here, in so many words, in St. Peter's speech on the occasion, where he says that one must be chosen "*to be a witness with us of the resurrection*" of Christ. We may say then, that the immediate office of the apostles was, to bear witness to the facts of Redemption, and specially to its crowning fact, whereby all the rest were proved and substantiated, the resurrection of Christ. And this we find to have been their employment at the first; and we find it also to have been looked back upon as their special employment by those who came afterwards. In the later

Epistles of the New Testament, we have the testimony of the Apostles referred back to; both their testimony to matters of fact, as in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "the things which we have heard", and their testimony to matters of prophecy, as in the Epistle of Jude, "Remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time." That, then, was the immediate office of the apostles. But they soon found themselves called, as indeed the very circumstances would have enabled them, and doubtless did enable them from the first to see that they would be, to the government of the Church. They stood in the Lord's place; not indeed primarily, for that the Holy Spirit of God did, the Comforter, who was sent to make up to the Church for his absence; but they stood, full of that Holy Ghost, in the high places of the Church of Christ, to direct and to govern. We find them doing this on many occasions. We find St. Peter, who was especially prominent among them in the early part of this book of the Acts of the Apostles, taking upon him on more occasions than one the performance of direct acts of authority, and performing them in the power of God's Spirit, and that Spirit ratifying their performance. I need mention but one of these, namely the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, than which we can hardly conceive a more notable and striking example. This power of governing the Church appears to have remained with the apostles in a supernatural manner through the whole of their course. We can only judge indeed from the language of one who was not at first an apostle, nor ever one of the Twelve, namely St. Paul. In his writings to those Churches which had offended, and where he anticipates having to exercise discipline on his return to them, he speaks in all the fulness of supernatural power; he speaks as if he could exercise more power than he did; as if he wished to be gentle among them, but at the same time could come to them "with a rod", if he

pleased, and not "in the spirit of meekness". And we find him speaking of some things which he had done; mysterious indeed, as they are now expressed to us, but doubtless implying something of the exercise of this supernatural power: he speaks of persons whom he had "delivered over to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme".

We may fairly infer then, that this power belonged to the apostles. But now let us trace a little onward (and it is most important for the subject of to-day that we should do so, for it serves as a foundation for us in what we have to say), and ask ourselves,—Of what kind was this power, with regard to duration? Was it intended, do you suppose, to be lasting in the Church? We must answer this question by looking forward in history, and seeing how future vacancies in this College of the Apostles were treated. We need not look very far. In the beginning of the 12th Chapter, we have one of the principal Three of the Apostles, Peter, James and John, namely James the brother of John, taken from his labours to his rest by martyrdom. "Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword." Now we do not hear of any attempt made to fill up that vacant place; nor do we hear anything from this time forward of the completeness of the number of the Apostles, or anything which might lead us to suppose that the office was intended to be permanent. They did their work, and a very precious and indispensable work it was,—the work of founding the Church of Christ. They did that work by no means alone. It may have been, that the very supernatural power of which I spoke was not confined to the Apostles themselves. There are traces of the fact being so. But whether it were so or not, they did that work in common with those who were their contemporaries, in common with the elders of the Church, in common with those who had seen the Lord as well as them; they standing as the chief among them, but the others bearing their part also. When

there arose the most important question of dispute that ever has vexed the Church since it has been a Church, namely the question of the obligation of circumcision and of keeping the Jewish law, we read that the Apostles *and elders* assembled together to consider of this matter; and in the 15th chapter of the Acts, the matter is considered of and is determined upon, not as the act of the Apostles alone, but of the Apostles *and elders and brethren*—in other words, of the whole visible Church of Christ then assembled together. So that there is no reason to suppose, that the apostolic office was ever intended to last as such, or to be represented in any way in the future ages of the Church.

And now, of course, there comes another very important question, which we must not put by, but we must deal with it at this the threshold of the history of the Apostolic Church:—Is there any reason to suppose that the Apostles themselves, and no others, were to be the fountains of power for ordaining to the ministry in subsequent ages of the Church? Now I think we shall find, in reading and judging simply and fairly, as the facts stand, of the history of the Acts of the Apostles, that there is no reason to make that supposition; that there is, on the other hand, every reason to suppose that many of the ministers in the Churches, some of the chief ministers in the Churches at the very beginning, were not laid hands on by the Apostles, were ordained to the work of the ministry just by the Churches among whom they sprang up, and that this power was never supposed to belong to, or to be derived from, the Apostles at all—that it was a power from the first supposed to reside in the company of believers constituted by the dwelling of the Spirit of the Lord in them, and the faculty which that Spirit gave them of choosing from among themselves fit men for the Ministry. This is a question purely relating to circumstances where it is to be dealt with *of necessity*; it is not one which concerns the common order of the Church of Christ, the order of the Church of

Christ as established age after age, the Ministers of the Church choosing other persons to be their successors in the Ministry, as matter of form and decency; and the keeping up the outward appropriateness of those who are to perform the sacred office is not concerned in this question. But the question would at once come in, were there a Church established,—were there a Body of Christians resident, where such outward succession, and such decency, as arranged in the Churches of Christ now subsisting, could not be had recourse to, or were not available. There need be no scruple in the mind of any Christian with regard to the power of the Ministerial Office, whatever break in the mere temporal order of succession there might be or had been in any Church at any time.

And such an inference, I think, at once leads us on to the question, with regard to the great event which happened as in the text I have read to you. The Apostles and the rest of the Church were now in a waiting state; they were living in prayer and supplication, as we read in the 14th verse of the first Chapter, together with all the present believers, the number of whom was about 120 at the time that St. Peter made his proposal to them for filling up the vacancy in the apostolic body. "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come*", or, as perhaps the literal sense is, (it is a mere trifle) while the Day of Pentecost itself, the fiftieth day, was being fulfilled, was going on; while the hours of that day were proceeding. It may be well to say something respecting that day itself. It was a day ordained in the Law, as you will find in the 23^d Chapter of Leviticus and the 9th and following verses, for special observance. We begin rather further back than the ordinance of the Day itself, just to explain that whereof it was to be the observance. "The Lord spake unto Moses saying, speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest unto the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow

after the Sabbath"—that is after the special Sabbath on which the Passover was slain, which has been spoken of in the preceding verses—"the Priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day, when ye wave the sheaf, an he lamb without blemish, of the first year, for a burnt offering unto the Lord"; and so on. And then in the fifteenth verse, "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete"—that is 49 days—even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord". And that, as the subsequent verses go on to show, was to be the great Feast of the ingathering of the Harvest, the Harvest having been during those seven weeks completed. In the other place, in the Book of Deuteronomy, where the same is appointed, in the 16th Chapter, which I will not read, it is stated, "Begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn".

We have now, therefore, arrived at an idea of what that day was, from whence counted, and of what it was to be the celebration. Now let us apply these circumstances to the Gospel History with which we are concerned. The Lord had been crucified either on the very day or on the day after the offering of the Paschal Lamb. He was our Passover, and He was raised from the dead either on the very day or on the day after the waving of that sheaf of which we have just read to you. That waving itself was symbolical of his resurrection. He compares himself to a corn of wheat cast into the ground and dying, which, when it is raised up again, shall bring forth much fruit. From that time the seven weeks had proceeded; and now was the Feast of the Harvest—now was the time of the great ingathering of the Spirit, the time when all the field of the World should be occupied by the servants of the Lord, the Labourers sent forth into the Harvest, the Lord "giving the word, and the company of the preachers being great". So that there was an es-

pecial fitness in this very day for the event of which we read as happening upon it.

There is another view of the Day of Pentecost which was very common among the Jews, which does not appear in Scripture, but to which nevertheless some weight of mention ought to be attached. By comparing the history in Exodus, we find that it was just about this time after the Passover in going out of Egypt, that the giving of the law from Sinai took place. It may have been, and very probably was, at the exact interval. I say "very probably was", because the Jews seem to have regarded the Day of Pentecost as the commemoration of the giving of the Law from Sinai. It will at once occur to you, that if this was correct (and there is no reason to suppose it otherwise), the fitness of the Day for the descent of the Spirit was even greater still; that the time when that law was given, which seemed as the basis of the promise, that God would give a new law to his people, that he would "put his law into their hearts and write it upon their minds", was at all events a fit precursor of the time, when the Holy Spirit should descend upon them, and fill them with his influence and his power.

This day then was going on; the hours of it were being fulfilled. Now there is reason to suppose likewise, that the apostles would naturally have expected this to be the day of the descent of the Spirit. Our Lord had told them "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence". This naturally would have cast their minds onward to the end of the very definite interval that was then passing between two Feasts. They would have looked forward to the Feast of Weeks, as it was called, the day of Pentecost, the next great great day of the Law, to fulfil that of which the last great day of the Law had given them so noble an earnest and promise, namely the Lord himself being sacrificed as their Passover.

They were met together then. And about what they were employed, there can be no doubt. They were met "*with one accord*": and the word is not to be passed over lightly; it means, "*with one mind*": they were all of one mind at the moment; and that one mind was employed, as we see it was constantly, day by day, from the first Chapter, "*in prayer and supplication*". For what they were praying, there can be no doubt. I endeavoured on a former occasion to derive from the fact of their being engaged in prayer and supplication while so great a promise was certainly assured to them, a reason for ourselves, under similar circumstances, to pray and strive with God for the performance even of his most certain promises. Doubtless they were praying. They were *all* collected. There are two words in the Greek language signifying *all*: one is merely, the whole number just spoken of: the other, all together, the whole number that could be assembled. Of those words the latter is the one used—"*ἅπαντες*"—all the Believers in Christ present at Jerusalem; not merely all the apostles, nor only all the 120 names spoken of in the first Chapter: for remember it was now a feast time; it was one of those three occasions when all the males of the Jewish people were bound to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem: so that we now have not the 120 names merely, but the Galilean Brethren in connection with them. All these were assembled; how many, we cannot say. Seeing that the Lord appeared on one occasion to 500 brethren, it is clear there could not have been much fewer than that number present on this occasion.

"*They were all together with one mind in one place*". We may ask, perhaps, what place that one place was. It has generally been supposed that it was some room belonging to the Temple: and the argument for that has been, that it was the hour of prayer. Now that argument is at most but very feeble. It was not the hour of prayer. When Peter by and by (and some time must have elapsed) made his

apology to those who misunderstood the event which was happening, he said to them, "These men are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day". Now the third hour of the day was certainly the hour of prayer: but then you must allow, between what is here spoken of and that apology, the happening of the event itself, the getting together of a multitude, upon the first great miracle being shewn, and the hearing by all these people who are mentioned, of the wonderful works of God in their own tongues; things which at least would occupy some space of time, say even half an hour or an hour. If so, it hardly could have been the hour of prayer at this moment. And again it is very improbable that they should have been assembled in such large numbers in any chamber belonging to the Temple. I would rather suppose it to have been, hardly perhaps in that upper chamber where they had been in the habit of assembling, seeing that the numbers must have been great, but in one of those large open Courts belonging to the houses in the East, which would hold vast numbers of persons, and which might yet admit of the expression being used, of the whole house being shaken where they were assembled.

Our attention is now drawn (and it is by far the most important fact of what we have to day to enter upon) to the great event which happened in this place and at this time. I said that we should hardly find time to day to enter upon the details of it. I will not do so, but reserve them for our next occasion, and will speak now of the event itself; **THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON THE CHURCH OF GOD.** Now in the first place, that was the great result of all that the Lord Jesus had suffered and done. Bear this ever in mind: because I am afraid that we are not disposed to give importance enough to this great event. There is an idea in the minds of Christians, that though we may in some sense look for the Spirit in these days in a different way from that in which the Saints of the Old Testament possessed

his influence, yet there is not any very great difference: that what David might have said, and what others of the Saints might have said then, may be said by Christians now in the same spirit, and under the same circumstances, except that they looked forward to the Saviour, and we look back upon Him. Now upon this let us take our Lord's own testimony; and I do not know that any testimony could be plainer. He himself said when he was upon earth, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he". Now do not these words show us plainly that there is a distinction, a distinction by no means to be lost sight of, which places the simplest Christian above the greatest and noblest person before Christ came in the flesh? And now let us enquire, in what that distinction consists. They had the Holy Spirit, it is true. When David had fallen into sin, he said, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me". They had the Holy Spirit, as may be shown by many evidences. They had the spirit of prophecy; they had the spirit of knowledge and enlightenment in outward skill, as we have it expressed in the Levitical books; and they had the Spirit convincing them and leading them, and comforting them, and guiding them in a certain sense. In what sense then could they never have the Spirit? Let us again go to our Lord's words where he says, "He will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment". Not one of those three, in the sense in which they are there spoken of, could the ancient, old Testament church ever enjoy. The conviction of sin, for instance: let us take our Lord's own description of it. "Of sin". Why? Because they have gone astray after their own natural lusts? Because they have disobeyed the commands of God? Doubtless those things are sin; and so far, the spirit of God convicted the old Testament believers of sin: but it is, "of sin, BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NOT ON ME". Now that conviction the Holy Spirit never could carry to the hearts

of those who had not had Christ set crucified before them. Then go to the next particular:—"Of righteousness". Now doubtless, there was a righteousness of which the saints of the old Testament could be persuaded and convinced, and which we might consider as a righteousness of God, by the Holy Spirit. There was a righteousness to which they could look forward, and to which they did look forward; as, for instance, when Jeremiah said, "This is His name whereby He shall be called, Jehovah OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS". But they never could be convinced of righteousness by the Holy Spirit as in the case where our Lord says, "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more"; because the righteousness of glorified humanity in His person is now approved of, and taken up to the Throne of God, and has become the subject of which the Holy Spirit, showing forth the things of Christ, shall convince the Church hereafter. Then you have the more mysterious and difficult one of those three—"Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged". Doubtless the Holy Spirit did, in the ancient Church, convince the saints of judgment in some sense. "I am wiser than my teachers; I am become wiser than the aged", the Psalmist says, under the influence of that same Spirit; and there was a spirit of judgment and of wisdom given to them so far. But look at our Lord's condition attached to this—the reason he gives for it: "Of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged": because by my life—my death—my resurrection—my glorification, the prince of this world, he that has the power of the vanity of this world—the pomp of this world, and all that is in this world, has been finally judged: So that the Christian now is "not ignorant of his devices", and can stand up and judge him, and oppose him, in a way in which he never was judged, opposed, and condemned, before. All those things shew you, that we have the Spirit in a very different way from that in which the ancient Church possessed the Holy Spirit.

But now there may arise a difficulty. It may be said, The descent of this Spirit was accompanied by miraculous agency, and during the whole time of the scripture History we read of that miraculous agency going on; we read of "signs and wonders" accompanying the presence of the Spirit. Very true. Let us however judge of Scripture by Scripture itself. Go through the Epistles of the Apostles of our Lord; see how they plead with believers in Christ; see the manner, I mean, in which that pleading is carried on: to what they refer as the grounds of faith, by which they endeavour to establish and substantiate that faith. Do we ever find that these miraculous gifts are allotted any prominent place? Do we find that they are ever set forth as the primary means? If you wanted to convince yourselves of this, in half an hour you might do it at your leisure at home, by reading the 12th 13th and 14th Chapters of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. There the Apostle St. Paul is dealing specially with these spiritual gifts. Spritual gifts had been made in Corinth, as they were made elsewhere, a means of exalting the vanity of those who wished to display them before the Church, and to depreciate the weightier matters of the Gospel, faith, hope, and love. The Apostle takes up the cause of these latter, not indeed in any way depreciating the former unjustly, but putting them in their proper place. He tells them to covet the best spiritual gifts, because they were bestowed for purposes which were important to be answered: but he says, "I shew you a more excellent way"; and he says, "Even if I had all gifts, if I had all knowledge, and if I were without LOVE, I should be as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, and should be worth nothing". From that portion of Scripture, you will see the relative importance of these gifts to those which abide with the people of God to this day, and never will depart from any heart or character, in which the Spirit of God is present and working. If we only fairly glance at the history of the Church, the meaning of these gifts will be very plain. They were to be as signs to unbelievers: to believers they were

valueless, except indeed, as in those days their spirits might be apt to sink within them, and their hearts to tremble, owing to the smallness of their number and the bitterness of their persecutions, these gifts might sometimes uphold them with a sense of the Lord's presence among them. To believers, they were of little consequence: they had the inward witness of the Spirit of God within them. He spoke within them, not in a voice occasioning miraculous effects, but in a purifying voice to the enlightened Christian conscience, testifying to the unity of their will with the will of their Father in Heaven, to the gradual change of their heart and life into the image of the glory of the Lord, as by the Lord the Spirit. To unbelievers they were a sign. We want not the sign (to unbelievers) now; we want not to go before them now with signs and miracles: we have now Christ's Church established through the world: would that she were worthy of her position: still we have her with kings her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers; we have whole nations outwardly and nominally having taken shelter under this church; and we have now only to say to the Church, "Be that which you profess"; we want not miraculous evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God.

Then it may still be said, Wherein have we this Spirit so that we may lay our hands upon it and may say, we possess something now palpable and demonstrable, which was not possessed in the days before this event? Now I say this is a question which very much must be answered by the conscience of the Christian man. You will see at once, that it is a thing which cannot be dealt with by non-Christians. The worldly man will naturally scorn the whole thing: he will say, I see no such evidence of the presence of the Spirit, as I might expect from that which you are saying: I do not see that your lives are purer, I do not see that your sayings are wiser, than those of other men. Now this is just what we might expect. We are told that the worldly man, the carnal man, the man (for so the expression

is, and I have often had occasion to remind you of it) who is carried by the power of his own natural mind and soul, and goes no further, does not understand the things of the Spirit of God. They are a strange language to him. Just as the Spirit, when He descended, made the people on whom he shed his influence speak new languages,—so the language of the Spirit is one altogether foreign to him who knows nothing of it, and there is no way in which we can set it before him. It is just one of those things which are so often the subject of ridicule, but in this instance far removed above ridicule in the estimation of every Christian,—which must be believed, in order to be seen.

Well, but then to the *believer*, what is it? Now here again, it is a matter of personal experience. We may gather something of its agency, from the progress in the outward Church of Christ, by its influence, towards that which is good and “pure and honest and of good report”. There has been such a progress, even on a large scale, in the world. We all acknowledge how different society is now from what it once was. Those who have lived many years can look back and can say, “In the Church of Christ, in the Ministry, in society in general, what a change there has been!” If we go again further back, we see various oscillations from good to bad and perhaps to worse and then back to better, but must it not be said that the general progress, in the midst of all these things, has been upward and onward, by means of the leaven of God’s Holy Spirit?

But let us come closer than this, and speak of the work of the Spirit in the believer himself. The work of the Spirit in the believer follows very much those three particulars, and in the order in which they stand, which our Lord gave, and which I have been quoting before. He begins by conviction of sin: and conviction of sin is not a mere trembling because the consequences of sin appear dreadful, but it is strictly, “Of sin, because they believe not on me”. The object of the whole of the Spirit’s work is, *CHRIST*. “He shall

take of the things of Christ, and shew them to us". And He begins by shewing to the previously hardened man, the man who has had no idea but that he is going on well in a decent outward life, the sinfulness of his unbelief on Christ. That which Christ has done, and that which Christ has said, are brought closer home to his heart. He sees in Him not only something to be approved, and not only something to be talked of with admiration, but something concerning himself: and then it arises in his mind, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against Him, who has given himself for me?". Now in this consists, I believe, in most cases, very variously carried out, as variously carried out as the different characters of individual men, the substance of the beginning of the Spirit's work. And then there is the uplifting by degrees,—very little understood at first, gradually more and more coming into light, and at last assuming something like completeness and form,—of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. From merely having had a vague idea (which may be a general description of the decent, Church-going, worldly man), that Christ somehow died for our sins, and somehow was raised for our justification, and somehow or other is pleading for us in Heaven,—there begins to be a fitting of part to part in the Lord's work, and we begin to see how He, perfect man and perfect God, fulfilled for us that Law which our race had transgressed, and passed beyond the fulfilment of: how he built up thus a perfect righteousness, and by being ours in respect of our human nature, our elder brother in the flesh, as well as our God in the Spirit, is that of which we may lay hold as our righteousness by faith, united to him, cleaving to him, partaking of that living sap which circulates in Him the head of the body, branches of that living vine, of which He is the sum and mystical substance. And so faith grows up by the work of the Spirit. None know of these things, or none know them as they ought to be known, personally and practically, but those

who know something also of the inward work of the Spirit of God. There is a knowledge of these things (and we ought all of us to tremble as we speak of them, for fear ours should be only that knowledge), which is a mere theoretical one, a knowledge arising from the reading of books, and from the putting together of propositions: but this is not that living knowledge which has Christ the Son of God, the perfect obeyer of God's Law for me, as a living person continually present, looking upon me, speaking with me, exercising towards me all those offices which belong to Christ's work, and asking gratitude, love, service, hope, in return.

Then the work of the Spirit advances (and now we have come close upon its completion) and it arrives at the convincing of judgment: the gifting man with wisdom; the enabling, as we very often see, the Christian child (for I would not put aside even such a case as that) to judge at once, in a moment, of right and wrong, about which the non-christian Casuist might dispute in vain; that simple and sharp apprehension, which judges the prince of this world, and detects the devices and works of the enemy of souls, which is perhaps, in its completion, though it goes on through the Christian life more or less, the fullest and most perfect work of the Spirit, and which makes all those who have really lived a Christian life so valuable in counsel; which makes some men, as if one asked at the oracle of God, so that they can almost in a moment exercise that faculty, than which none is more powerful even in worldly things (for it is found sometimes in worldly counsellors in the matters about which they are concerned;) at once speaking,—and carrying conviction with that which is said,—the right thing to be done,—the path to be followed, and the path to be rejected.

Now all this we have: and none of this, in anything like the completeness in which we possess it, had the church of old, or could the church of old have had; for it all flows out of Christ; it proceeds from the cross of Christ; and the

Holy Spirit of God is given to us not merely to make us (although these consequences also do follow in the exaltation of our nature by Christ) stronger, or wiser, or more skilful, than the ancients were before Christ came,—but to **TESTIFY OF CHRIST**; to take that which He has done, and to expand it before us, and to make us live into it, and regard it as a reality. All this we have, and we never had it before the day of which we are now speaking. This began on the day of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, every apostle became a different man from that which he was before. He knew before a few things which the Lord had instructed him of, which He had taught him, and, as it were, elaborately caused him to attend to, and to learn by heart, and to take as maxims which he could not understand. When this day had passed, or rather as soon as ever the Spirit had descended, all these things had new light thrown upon them; they were clear, and he became a different man. The apostles before saw the importance of testifying to those facts: they saw now, although not at once, but they had a light given them now, by which they could go about and search into, all the spiritual depths of the life of the Lord, and the things accomplished by it in men's hearts and souls with regard to eternal life.

I will only detain you one moment to say, that the standing record of this work of the Spirit is in the Holy Scripture. While miracles have passed away, while all those wonderful gifts of the Spirit in speech and persuasion which the apostles had,—and those had, who were contemporary with them,—have gone by,—God has been pleased to consolidate in one form the Spirit's testimony, and that is, the **WRITTEN WORD**. We have in the written Word, in the four Gospels, and the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, and the Acts of the apostles, remaining to us, an integral portion of the Pentecostal effusion of the spirit. We have it in all its freshness. Those books were written as no other books in the world ever have been written; and when I say, no

other books in the world, I mean specially and definitely to except the old Testament too. That was written by the inspiration of God, but, as you will easily gather from what has been said, not by such inspiration, that is to say of the same manifested and fully unfolded kind, as the new Testament. The old Testament was written in the fulness of the Spirit of God, as the Spirit then could be given, and as it was given; but not in the fulness of the Spirit of God, as he testified to Christ. The old Testament saints looked forward, and the Spirit in them looked forward, dimly to a Saviour to come. All the prophecies of the Old Testament, although they come from the Spirit of God, (it is not in *degree* of inspiration, that I am comparing them, but only in the necessary difference of *kind*) look forward to a distance; they all speak enigmatically; they are full of hard sayings; but the New Testament, although there are still sayings and things which we cannot comprehend, is all, as regards Christ and his work, as clear as the noon-day. It is the fullest and completest effusion of God's Holy Spirit which our nature is capable of receiving; and we have it, as I have said, in all its freshness. We need not lament the passing away of miracles; we need not desiderate those things which the apostles could do, and which we cannot do, and cannot see done; for we have the most valuable portion of that which the spirit was pleased to do and to speak, preserved to us in a wonderful way. Through all the changes of the church, in the midst of corruption, and in the midst of the destruction of many other books, this has survived; we are able now to go at once to the fountain-head, to judge of the work of God's Spirit for ourselves, and to have that work carried on within us, by means of the instrumentality of the written word, every one of us, even the most simple amongst us.

Having said these things, I think we may in some measure have prepared our minds for the details of the great event, all of them important, upon which we hope, by God's help, to enter next Sunday. Meantime let us ponder these

things concerning the work of the Spirit; for I need not say to you, that the most important question which a man can ask himself, which requires the most deliberate care and honesty and humility to be answered, is, "Have I the Spirit of Christ, or not?"

HOMILY V.

CHAPTER II. 1—11.

We spoke last Sunday afternoon of the general subject involved in this narrative; of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, the promise of the Father made by Christ; of the consequences of that descent of the Spirit, as regards the Church since then, contrasted with the Church before that time; and of the day which God chose, the day of Pentecost, to manifest forth this effusion of His Spirit. I reserved the details of the incident for this occasion. We will just say thus much respecting what last Sunday came before us. The day of Pentecost was the great day of the offering of the first fruits of the harvest. It was also regarded by the Jews, and it would seem not without some reason, though it is not specially in scripture thus described, as the anniversary of the giving of the law from mount Sinai. Both these particulars will come before us again to-day, and therefore it is well to mention them. We found it likely, that they were assembled together not in any chamber of the Temple, as has been sometimes supposed, but in some upper room perhaps, or court, of one of the houses in Jerusalem. It would hardly seem likely that so considerable a number of persons, and under such circumstances, were assembled in a public place; and there was a propriety likewise in their being gathered together in a private place, in the ordinary place at their ordinary occupation, prayer and praise in private, at the time when

this great event happened. We are thus far then in possession of those circumstances, which we endeavoured to make prominent last Sunday afternoon.

They were then thus employed in prayer and supplication, as they had been from day to day. "*And suddenly*", we read, "*there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind*". Now the term for "the SPIRIT", in both the languages in which the scripture was written, the Hebrew and the Greek, is identical with "wind" or "breath". We can hardly conceive, using two different words for those two things, the interchange of ideas that there would be in the minds of these persons between the two: how naturally the one would remind them of the other. In consequence of our language not being able to retain this identity, we are obliged sometimes to translate passages of scripture which contain it, and distinctly allude to it, in such a way, as to lose the allusion altogether. For instance that in the third chapter of St. John: "The spirit breatheth where it listeth"; "the wind breatheth where it listeth." Our Lord is speaking of the spirit; and He uses not so much a similitude, as the *very same word* as that with which he is dealing, in order to explain the nature of the influence of the spirit. Having been reminded of it, however, we can at once see here the aptitude of wind to represent the influence of the spirit. Nor were these Jews unacquainted with such aptitude, from the similitudes of the Old Testament. In the 37th chapter of Ezekiel we have a very notable instance of this. There, in a well known passage, the prophet is transported to a valley which is full of dry bones, and the question is asked him, "Son of man, can these bones live?" "And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest". Then he is ordered to "prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord". And as he so prophesied, "there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone". "Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy,

son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord". So that they had a direct and notable instance, where the spirit of the Lord was likened to the influence of, and represented by, the wind of heaven.

There came, then, upon the house where they are sitting a great sound "*as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting*". It was something so outwardly remarkable, as to be in the neighbourhood around noticed by the persons who were unaware of anything being about to happen, or being supplicated by prayer, or being promised. Multitudes were collected round, we find, very soon. Now it pleased God thus to notify the descent of his Spirit upon the Church by an outward incident, in order to mark it as a distinct event. He might have done it, doubtless, in other ways. One after another of the believers in Christ might have been clothed with power from on high, until all became just as they did become in the actual history: but then we should not have been able to point back to the moment when the promise of the Father was fulfilled.

Nor was it only fulfilled to the ear, but it was fulfilled also to the eye. Both the principal and noblest senses of

man were witnesses of the descent of the Spirit, and of the fulfilment of the Father's promise. "*There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them*". From the very first times, fire has been the emblem of the divine presence and the divine agency. It was so in Eden, at the time when our first parents, having sinned against God, were driven out from that happy place: there were cherubim placed, and a fiery sword, to keep them from the tree of life, to keep the way of the tree of life. Throughout the old law, God represented himself, and God acted in vengeance (and not only in vengeance) by the element of fire. Several times his enemies, those who rebelled against Him in the camp for instance, were devoured by this element. Then, likewise, the fire of the Lord descended in *approval*, and consumed the sacrifice that was offered to Him. The brightness of the Lord's presence, manifested by fire, again, filled the house, when Solomon dedicated the temple to Him. And so we might go on multiplying instances, where the Lord God acted in history, or represented himself in prophesy and in declaration of inspiration, by this element. And if we come to consider the nature of the element, we shall see how very aptly he has represented himself, corresponding to our senses and that which we know respecting his acts. The element of fire, above all others, has a two-fold influence, a blessing and a destroying influence. So has the power of the Spirit of God: He is a consuming fire to his enemies; He is a warming, cheering and enlightening fire to those who love Him, and those who are united to Him. "Our God is a consuming fire" to those who are out of Christ; but to those who are in Christ, the glory of his presence shall become their glory; for He says, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world".

The element of fire then, was chosen for the visible representation of the descent of the Spirit. And the form, also,

which it assumed, is to be noted. "There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them". In the great prophecy of this day, in the 63^d Psalm, we read, "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of the preachers": and it was the especial and primary effect of the descent of the Spirit, that the servants of the Lord should be clothed with power to go forth and to preach the Gospel throughout the world. So that there could be no emblem so significant, as that of tongues; "*cloven tongues*", because of the diversity of those tongues, it is always supposed, because of the division into various languages which had taken place at the confusion of tongues of old, which now, instead of being a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel, was to be a help to that spread, to carry it forward through the world.

This then was the audible and visible sign of the descent of the Holy Spirit, manifested to the Church. And now we come to the effect of it. "*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost*". Of this we spoke something last Sunday. We will not now therefore enter upon the general subject, what it was to be filled with the Holy Ghost, as distinguished from the partial influences of the Spirit of which we read under the Old Testament dispensation. But that which follows, "*and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance*", must detain us some time in enquiring exactly into that which is meant. Various views have been taken of this incident. The only view which the narrative itself seems to justify, is the simple and plain one which occurs to every person who first reads the words, namely, that they began to speak in *other languages*, languages which they had never learned, various tongues of various people, as the spirit gave them utterance; that is, not as they had themselves learned or themselves acquired, not by power given to them to use those languages, but just as they were made mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit for that special occasion.

Now in entering upon this question, we may at once say, that there is no reason whatever to suppose, from the

history in the Scripture itself, or from that which follows upon Scripture, which indeed we have in scanty measure, but still what we have is very valuable, that the Apostles or others were gifted with the *ordinary* power of *using*, for the preaching of the Gospel, languages which they had never learned. Such an idea appears never to have been prevalent in the Church till about the fourth century. We then first find it, long after the gift of tongues itself had died out from the Church, being in God's providence rendered unnecessary. We then find the idea prevalent, that the Apostles went forth, being able to speak by miraculous power the language of every country into which they carried the Gospel, and that that power began on this day, and was regularly and normally continued to them from this time. But if we examine the history of the Acts of the apostles itself, we do not find, I think, any such indication. If we take the case of St. Paul, who although not one of those present of this occasion was certainly, if ever any man was, called to be an apostle in an especial manner, and endowed with the gifts of an Apostle, if we look at the 14th chapter of this same book of the Acts, we shall find, I think, an instance which we hardly can but interpret inconsistently with such a theory as that which I have been mentioning. We find St. Paul coming into Lycaonia: and when the people saw a miracle which he had wrought (you will find it in the 11th verse of the chapter) "they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men". And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people". And now we for the first time read, "which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things"? Now from this narrative, (though certainly it would not be an

altogether sure inference; there might be another way of explaining it, that the apostles were not present when the cry was made) it seems most probable, especially as it is mentioned that the cry was *in the speech of Lycaonia*, that the apostles did not understand that which was said, nor did they until the circumstance happened of the oxen and the garlands being brought before the gates and it being shewn by that, what was intended to be done to them: and it is the most probable view of this narrative that for that very reason the words "*in the speech of Lycaonia*" are inserted, to shew that the reason why the apostles did not at once repudiate that which was said was, that it was in a tongue foreign to any which they knew.

Again, in the very early Church there was the constant idea, mentioned by several of the early writers, that St. Mark was the interpreter of St. Peter; that he went about with him interpreting,—probably, from the name of *Mark*, we may venture to say in the *Latin* language—at all events interpreting into some language which those to whom St. Peter preached could understand, the tenor of his preaching, which would naturally be in his own language, the language which he had learned from his youth on the lake of Gennesaret, mixed also perhaps with some portion of that Greek which was commonly spoken in the Holy Land.

These circumstances, and others, and indeed the whole analogy of God's dealings with regard to the preaching of the Gospel, if we enter into it, will lead us, I think, to repudiate the idea, that it was a permanent miraculous power of speaking various languages, which was conferred upon the disciples on this occasion. Well then, what was it? It clearly was a miraculous power, and clearly a power of speaking other languages. Then you may ask, and perhaps ask with some surprise, Was this power of no use? The use of it on this occasion is pretty clearly detailed in that which follows. The use of it on other occasions, we have to learn from the other notices of it which occur in the New Testa-

ment; and these, happily, are neither few nor obscure. The incident of our chapter to-day is linked to several other instances of the same kind in this book, and in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where they are mentioned by St. Paul. In the 10th chapter of this same book, towards the end, we have the second great effusion of the Holy Spirit, on the Gentiles, as this to-day is on the Jews. In that chapter, St. Peter was made use of by God's Spirit to open the door of faith to the Gentiles, to the uncircumcised nations of the earth, who had not been received into God's former covenant; and the result was unexpected even by himself. He was speaking at the time, and explaining to Cornelius and to the company about him the circumstances under which he had come to preach to them. Then we read, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost"; by that word "*also*", you see, clearly identifying it with this gift of which we read to-day. "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God". That then was the same gift, bestowed on a similar occasion upon the Gentiles, as this upon the Jews.

Then if we go on to the beginning of the 19th chapter, we find that St. Paul, coming to Ephesus, found certain disciples, and asked them, whether they received the Holy Ghost on their first believing. They answered him, No; that they had not so much as heard, there had been no mention made to them at that time, whether there were any Holy Ghost. Then he says to them, "Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied". Now that again is an incident precisely of the same kind, the gift of the Holy Spirit accompanied with the speaking of tongues; and I quote that third instance, because it is linked together with the name of St. Paul, and thereby becomes important: for when we go on to his own Epistle, the First Epistle to the Corinthians, we see that the speaking with tongues which he there mentions is the same with that which occurred on that occasion, the same therefore with that in the 10th chapter, and that linked, by the "*also*"—the identity of communication to Gentile and to Jew, to this of which we are speaking to-day: so that it cannot be said by any one that the descriptions apply to different things, or that the speaking with tongues was not the same.

Now let us turn to the 14th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the one following that beautiful chapter which constituted our Second Lesson this afternoon. There St. Paul is expressly dealing with this gift of speaking with tongues, and he deals with it in this way: he is depreciating the gift; not unworthily, for it was a gift of God for important purposes, but in comparison with other and greater gift of the Christian character. He has been speaking, in that noble chapter which we read this afternoon, of love, of faith, and of hope, as far greater gifts than any of these miraculous ones; and he now shews us, following on in his argument, why they are so, by dealing with the miraculous gift itself. "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men", he says, "but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries". Then again, "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church". And so he goes on; and if at your leisure you look through that chapter, you will find that beyond all question this is shown;—that it did not follow, either that a man who spoke

in an unknown tongue himself understood what he said, or that there was any one present who understood it, as a matter of course. There might be such persons present. The gift of *interpretation of tongues* the apostle deals with, as a separate gift from that of speaking with tongues; and he describes this latter as being a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not; and treats of it as being simply a sign and nothing else; as not being a gift of use in the church, any further than that use of being a sign, a token of God's miraculous presence, is concerned.

Now I think that without further going into the subject, which would be tedious, although it might still be profitable to know and to say more of it, we see at once the nature of that which now happened. There were present at Jerusalem multitudes of devout persons. They may have been present on account of its being the time of the Feast; or, which is more likely, they may have been resident at Jerusalem, having been natives of other countries. It would be very natural that many a pious Jew, born in these various countries, the names of which we have catalogued here, might have come up to reside at Jerusalem, from motives of piety, wishing to be near to the place where God had put his name, and to the associations of His worship. All these persons then heard the wonderful works of God spoken forth, each in his own language. The Spirit poured upon the disciples the power of uttering these things in different tongues. Whether they understood them themselves, we cannot say; they may have done so, or they may not; at all events those who heard them understood them, and those who heard them must have carried away, either back to their own countries, if they were sojourning only on account of the feast,—or to their own homes, and thus have become the resident seed of the Jerusalem church,—an impression of what had happened on that day, which nothing afterwards could ever efface.

There was another propriety in the outpouring of this

sign upon the church. We know that when the first law was given, those who were present on that occasion were regarded as the representatives, the first fruits, so to speak, of all Israel which should follow in after ages. Moses says, "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day". The Lord regardeth you, that is, as a specimen or a first fruit of the whole subsequent people of Israel. So was the church which was present on the day of Pentecost: a first fruits of the great ingathering of the harvest which was afterwards to come: and the pouring out of the gift of the Spirit of various tongues upon the Church on that occasion, was a representation, to the world and to the Church, of that power which should thereafter be given in the ages of time, and by more ordinary methods of acquirement, but still by the power of the same Spirit, of preaching the Gospel in all the languages of the earth. That was a representative day; and those who were there collected,—whether the 120 names, or more brethren who had come up from Galilee or elsewhere,—were the representatives of the whole Church of God. So upon them was poured out this gift.

And of what did they speak? They "*began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*" And we learn what it was that they spoke by the confession of these persons who were present:—"We hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. WHAT "wonderful works of God"? we may ask. What did they speak forth, consciously, or as they were mouthpieces of the Spirit? The works of God in redemption, we may say, above all. Praise is the natural utterance of the human voice, if the human voice had never been perverted from its original intention for which God created it. See how the sacred Writers call upon all things that breathe to praise the Lord. See how all those things which have not been perverted

from their original intention do praise him. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." All his works praise him and speak forth his glory. And it is only because man has given way to sin and been perverted from God that he is not praising him likewise. But the moment the Spirit of God comes upon the Church, the Church bursts out in praise. It is "the wonderful works of God"—the works of God, not in creation, but in restoring, converting, revivifying, sanctifying the souls of men—the works of "the promise of the Father", now at last poured out in such ample measure upon the Church. We know not what it was, that the believers on that day declared; it is not preserved to us. It doubtless was a hymn of praise; perhaps indetical with some given in the Old Testament before; perhaps a new song; but it doubtless was a hymn of praise, which we too are capable of uttering, which any one in the power of the Spirit may utter; any one, that is, whose heart and affections are set on things above, and who praises God for what he has himself known, and felt and lived, and experienced, of God's redeeming love and mercy.

Such then, in its details, was the incident of this day. Something may be required, perhaps, respecting the description here given of those who heard, and who declared the wonderful works of God which they had heard, with astonishment. It is not my purpose in these expositions, to go into anything which is of purely historical or geographical interest, any further than may be requisite for explaining matters which throw light upon the text and the history. The catalogue here given is one simply proceeding in the natural order from the north-east to the south-west, taking the nations which lie, as that order is kept. They were the nations among whom for the most part the Jews were scattered. There were devout, men fearing God, some the remnants of the captivity, some who had been since then called by commerce, or by one providence of God or another, to

take up their abode in those parts, and who had from thence flocked together to Jerusalem either temporarily, as I have said, or for the purpose of residence. God had been making in all those parts a wonderful preparation for this great day of which we are now reading. It had pleased Him, some ages before the time at which we are now placed in history, yea even many ages before that incident, to raise up a conqueror who should go forth throughout the whole east, who should carry with him the language in which the word of God was afterwards written, who should shew especial favour to God's people the Jews, and plant immense numbers of them in a great city which he founded, Alexandria, and called by his own name. All these were God's preparation for the dispersion of the Gospel among the tribes of the earth. Everywhere in the world in those days, everywhere that is, where there was civilization, there were Jews. There were multitudes of Jews in Rome, the capital of the earth. There were Jews scattered throughout all Asia Minor; many of them we here read of. There were Jews all along the north coast of Africa. And there were Jews who had remained from the captivity in the vast tracts of the east and north-east. Everywhere there were those who knew the God of Israel, and who upon hearing this which the God of Israel had done and poured out upon his people, would be at once attracted and moved, either by hostility or in a friendly mood, towards, or from, the revelation of Jesus Christ; both of these evidently being the purposes which God had to serve. In these things we may watch His preparations; and these are far more interesting to us than to make any hypothesis which is not justified by Scripture itself, and to carry it out at once by way of getting rid of all difficulties. If we do not find that the Apostles were thus enabled, wherever they went, to speak to the people in their own tongues regularly and as a matter of course, we are at least least linked on to the apostolic age by knowing that it is in the same way that God is now spread-

ing the knowledge of the cross and the missionary work in his church. We see that He is making use of the same methods, and that he only resorted to supernatural means, when He himself in his all-wise Providence knew that they were requisite for the existence of the Church, and for a sign to those among whom it was at the time.

Let me, in conclusion, remind you of something respecting the great event itself, that we may not spend our time wholly upon the details to-day. The most of what was to be said upon it we endeavoured to say last Sunday; but we may add this much more. This filling with the Holy Spirit did not consist in, nor did it find its result and its field of action in, the supernatural effects of which we have read to-day. You must learn to separate them from the ordinary effects. You must learn at once to read such a description as this without any regret; not to say, "Where is now this rushing mighty wind; where are now these tongues of flame? Would that we could have some manifestation of these things". Now that is just the spirit in which one of the Apostles asked, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us": and our Lord said to him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father". May we not say in the same way, when some are disposed to ask, "Shew us the Spirit, and it sufficeth us",—Has the Spirit been so long time with us, and do we not know his agency? Wherever you see a sinner converted to God, wherever you see a heart led in devotion to God's service, there is the Spirit; there is the Spirit in his real genuine work; not indeed in the rushing mighty wind, or in the tongues of flame; not in the sign of speaking by tongues, which very soon vanished from the Church; but in his regular accustomed ordinary working, in the convictions which Our Lord himself declared should be his work in the world, in convincing the man that he is a sinner, and leading him to Christ for righteousness, and clothing him with heavenly

wisdom which the world has not. These are the operations of the Spirit: would that we all had the evidence of them in ourselves. And in order to have it, we must seek for it in God's appointed way, in the means and ordinances of the study of God's word, the habit of continual and earnest and genuine prayer. The Spirit cometh not, as then, suddenly and unexpected; but now He is about his ordinary work, carrying on, through the great day of the Church's life, that which the Father hath set him to do, even as Christ carried on through the day of *his* life upon earth that which the Father had set *Him* to do: and what the Father hath set the Spirit to do, depends, in the inscrutable purposes of God, upon our seeking for it. "Seek, and ye will find". Be then (and that will be the best application which you can carry away from our meditation upon this great event) in earnest; seek for God's spirit; and seek for Him in the ordinary way of his operations, in the channels of the means of grace, in God's word, in prayer, in the sacraments. Be continually found wherever He is to be found; and thus, growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,—to exhibit whom to us is the work of the Spirit, to tell about whom is his office,—you will be growing in the power of the Spirit, just as certainly and as surely as these holy men of old grew in his power, when they were clothed with these miraculous gifts, with astonished multitudes questioning around them. We have lost nothing, nay we have gained, for we have seen ages of God's dealings which they never saw; we have seen the work of the Spirit carried on in its ordinary way, which they were a long time before they could arrive at an idea and comprehension of; we have seen all those various discussions, and those various questionings and siftings of doctrines, which in God's Providence have formed part of the work of his Spirit; for he sifteth the truth by agitating men's minds, and teaching them to enquire about the truth; and we know, respecting our Lord's Person and

Office, respecting all the great truths of revelation, not indeed more than they knew, for God caused them to know and declare what was that Person and Office, and it is from them that we have derived our knowledge; but we know the mistakes which have been made on one and the other hand, we can see from what dangers the Church has been preserved, and we stand in all respects further on in the work of the Spirit; we have even more to be thankful for, we have even more to bless God for, who has poured out his Spirit then and ever since, than they could have, who formed the first-fruits of the great multitude whom no man can number. As they then must have rejoiced at the event of that day, so let us rejoice who have read it and meditated on it. God hath visited and redeemed his people. We are not left orphans, for our Father is present with us by means of his Holy Spirit. May He dwell in and abide in every one of us, brethren, that we be found not walking according to the flesh, but walking according to his leadings; and in the day when our great Head shall appear, when the work of the Spirit will have been done upon earth, and those who have lived in the Spirit shall be united to Him for ever, may we not be cast out, but find our lot with them.

HOMILY VI.

CHAPTER II. 12—36.

We have spent now two Sunday afternoons over the great event which gave rise to this speech of St. Peter. We endeavoured to set before you, the Sunday before last, the general importance of that event, that which it wrought in the church of Christ, and the difference which it has made between this present dispensation and the one which went before it; and last Sunday we entered more into the details of the event itself, the circumstances wherewith it was accompanied, and the effect which it had upon the multitude who were around. We now come to the first testimony of the Church before the world; and a most important testimony it is; the first outpouring upon mankind of that gift of the Spirit of which the world knew not, but which was now for the first time present among the servants of Christ.

We begin with noticing the double effect of that which had happened; upon the *believers*, those who received it, that is, worthily and seriously, as being a great event for which they could not account,—and the *unbelievers*, the mockers, who would fain,—as there are always persons who will fain turn everything divine into jest,—account for it by some degrading effect upon those present owing to causes totally alien from that which happened. We are told that “*they were all amazed*”; these persons who heard the wonderful works of God in their own languages, and said one to another, *What meaneth this?*” What will this turn to?

But others, and manifestly not those who had heard the works of God in their own languages, "*others mocking said, These men are full of sweet wine;*" that wine, most likely, which, being the first expressed from the grape, partook most of the sweetness, and most also of the intoxicating quality; at least so we are told. These questions and this mockery gave occasion to St. Peter, who was now the prominent person in the Church,—having been, and throughout the whole of this early part of the acts of the apostles being specially by the spirit of God pointed out as the actor and the speaker,—to come forward with the Eleven.

We now then are come to a decisive moment, when the church of Christ is called upon to stand forth and to bear testimony before the world in her Lord's absence. He had ever hitherto done this Himself: while He lived, his disciples were a scattered, fearful flock; they dared not stand out and speak; but now power was bestowed upon them, seeing that the Spirit had come on them from on high. We may imagine before us, then, the scene; the 120, or however many more there may have been of brethren, who were all concerned in this great effect of the work of the spirit; the Eleven standing forth before them, and Peter lifting up his voice, in front of course amongst them, the multitude listening meantime in wonder, some of them in scorn.

Now the process of this speech of St. Peter, all of which I have read to you to-day, is a very simple one, and it will only require just laying forth in order, and the few casual points which occur clearing up as we go by. You will observe, that he rests the whole of his explanation of this fact which had happened upon a prophecy of the old Testament. He begins by addressing them as "*Men of Judæa,*"—men who are Jews—"and ye that dwell in Jerusalem, all of you; let this be known to you, and listen to", lay up in your ears, "*my words*". He thereby bespeaks their favour, as addressing them as God's people, and as collecting together

those who had heard these things in their own language, placing them all under the category of those who inhabited Jerusalem, and were dwelling in Jerusalem at that time. We may be prepared then for a speech which shall be eminently *Jewish*; and so the whole of it is. It was God's will, that the Gospel should be addressed first to the Jew, then to the Gentile; and throughout this first division of the book of the Acts we find the Jews preached to, the Jewish Church spoken of, the work of the Gospel in Jerusalem and in Judea brought forward into prominence: and this is a very important point for the understanding and the setting clearly together of these early discourses of the Apostles.

"*For*"—and that word "*for*" bespeaks attention; listen to my words; for this is not, as some of you seem to think, a trifling matter—not a matter of jest and scorn—"for these men are not, as ye suppose, drunken, seeing it is but the third hour of the day". A passing shadow comes across our thought as we utter these words. If this was so decisive a reason for this sin, in the very infancy of the Church of Christ, not occurring at that time of the day, how far have we advanced in banishing it altogether from society, several centuries after these words were uttered? I am afraid, that the reason would not be quite so decisive in Christian England, or in Christian London. However, this is but a passing thought. It shews, at all events, that though hypocrisy and hollow-heartedness seemed to have eaten out the Jewish Church, there was yet some regard for the decencies of life among them: more regard perhaps, than there is throughout society in countries far further advanced in the knowledge of God since the coming of Christ.

Then he proceeds to tell them what this really is. "*But*", he says, "*this is that which was spoken by means of the prophet Joel*". Now Joel prophesied the first of all the prophets—of all I mean whom we properly and strictly regard as prophets; of all who have left us written prophetic books. Of course there were Samuel, and Elijah, and

others, long before. Joel prophesied, as you find in the margin of your Bibles, 900 years before Christ; 200 years before Isaiah; and in his prophecy there are some very remarkable things, and among them none more remarkable than this great prophetic reference, which the Apostle Peter here puts in the very fore-front of the explanation of the greatest event that has ever happened to the Church. Joel is prophesying, in that second chapter, from which these words are taken, of a great destruction and consumption of the means and necessities of life, and the people themselves of God, which should take place by means of a great army which He should send among them. In the first and primary significance of the prophecy, the destructive work of that army is described to mean the devastating effect of locusts and various insects which should eat up the fruits of the earth—I suppose at a season soon after the prophecy, but from the influence of which God would deliver his people, so that they should be again in prosperity. But manifestly, as every student who is acquainted with prophecy will see, God intends not, by speaking of such events as these, to speak of nothing more than these. There is a system of parallelism throughout prophecy, wherein the small deliverance is made to precede the greater one, the small destruction to threaten the greater one. And so there are expressions all through that prophecy in the second chapter of Joel, as you will find, if you read it at your leisure, which will not and cannot belong to anything so insignificant as that, to which it seems immediately to apply. Well then, at the end of it these words occur, or very nearly these words: “It shall come to pass after these things, saith the Lord”. Now you will observe that there St. Peter has altered the words of the prophecy, so as to apply it to the time of which he was then speaking; and it is a most important alteration: “It shall come to pass *after these things*”, it is in Joel; but he says, “It shall come to pass *in the last days*”. This is of course partially an *interpretation* of the prophecy—an interpretation of the prophecy

as relating to the latter days, or the days of the Messiah, as "the last days" were universally understood among the Jewish people. I may just remark in passing, that this prophecy, as well as the others which are spoken of in this speech, is quoted almost verbatim from the Septuagint or Greek version of the Scriptures, and that it would be most probable (it is a trifling matter, but still one of interest) that St. Peter made this speech in the generally used tongue of the whole of the East at that time, namely in the Greek language. These Jews who had dwelt in various places, and who had come up to Jerusalem for the feast, or were dwelling there for other reasons, would all of them be acquainted with that language; and the circumstance of the words being thus cited from the Septuagint version makes it still more probable. "*It shall come to pass in the last days*"—the last dispensation—the days which are to be followed by no other days of a different kind in the dealings of God with men; for such is very clearly the meaning, both here, and in other prophetic passages of Scripture. We may shew that that is the case here, by the very words of the prophecy itself, as compared with that which the Apostle says after the passage which we have read to-day. In the end of the prophecy, at the 21st verse, it is, "It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved". Well now, St. Peter himself paraphrases these words in the 39th verse: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call". So that he does not mean it of an imminent and present deliverance, but he speaks of *their children*, he speaks of generations to come: he is dealing then clearly with these last days as the period to which reference is made, the days of the Messiah, which were known as the last days universally in the writings and the discourses of the Jews.

"*It shall come to pass*", then, "*in these last days, saith God, that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.*" This is not, as you think, a being "drunken with wine wherein is excess", but a pouring out of the Spirit. It would seem almost as if, in those words in the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul had alluded to this event; for there is a strict analogy and correspondence with that which here took place. It is not the pouring out that you think. These men are indeed, if you choose to use the word and to speak of it in that sense, drunken, but not with wine; they are enthusiasts, but not from the intoxication of the flesh. They are possessed by the Spirit of God. God has poured out his Spirit upon them. He has filled them with his Spirit; and this is the pouring out of the Spirit which is to be given to them and to all flesh. It is not to be on a selected few; not upon one people as it once was, as it was indeed up to this moment; not upon one family, or upon one college of the prophets, as we find it in the Old Testament; but upon all flesh. Every son and daughter of Adam shall have access to this outpouring from God, in the time which is to come.

"*And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants*"—it is not the "servants of God", as commonly understood, that are meant there, but the class of society which are so called—on the slaves, male and female—"on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Here then the last days are gathered up, as it were, into one idea. They are begun by the outpouring of the Spirit, and the signs and wonders accompanying it:

they are ended by the day of the Lord. Now between these two we are living at this moment. How long a period shall pass between the two, Scripture does not inform us. It is concealed from men; yea, even from the angels of heaven; yea, which is more wonderful still, even from the Son himself in his humiliation. To the Father only it is known. But these two are the great characteristics of the last time; the pouring out of the Spirit at the beginning of it, the day of the Lord at the end. And nothing happens between these two, in the doings and dealings of God, which is worth mention. The whole between these two, is just simply a development and unfolding of the purposes of God; the bringing of all things under the feet of Christ, gradually, by ordinary means, the common means of grace in the Church, and the common workings of Providence in the world. There shall be no other great break, so to speak. The Holy Scriptures uniformly deal with the latter times, the times of the Messiah, the dispensation of the Spirit, by these two termini, the first and the last, which bound that dispensation.

Then he proceeds to the interpretation of the prophecy, "*Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*". Well, but who is this Lord? The answer to that question is found in the rest of St. Peter's speech. "*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*". Now this testimony with regard to our Lord, divides itself into three parts. HE is the Lord here spoken of, that is to be called upon. That is the great thesis of the Apostle, which he proves. He first proves it by the acts of Jesus himself during his life in the midst of them. This is in the 22nd verse. He then proves it by means of his resurrection, from the 23rd to the 32nd verses.

He then finally proves it by means of this which he had wrought on this day, from the 33rd to the 36th verses. Now the first of these articles is what we have read in the 22nd verse. You remember the course of Jesus among you. He was a remarkable person. Nothing that He did can be forgotten by you. He was among you, a man sent from God, approved of God by means of signs and wonders and miracles, in the midst of you. All these things are facts well known: for this thing was not done in a corner. By this you see that he bespeaks attention for Him whom he is introducing as the Lord to be called upon by them.

Then he proceeds to the weightier proof, of the Lord's resurrection. "*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken.*" And observe how the Spirit endues St. Peter here with eminent and admirable skill. "*Him ye have taken.*" Well, then, if it be we who have taken him, he cannot be the Christ of God, if we had power over him. But you see how he fences this point, and brings in between the assertion of it and their objection this weighty particular, "*being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.*" He thereby, you see, challenges proof of that matter, which he is ready at any time to produce. Christ had taught his disciples, during the time He was with them, out of the Scriptures, that He ought so to have suffered, and to enter into his glory. We at any time now, can from the Old Testament prove in the same manner that it was the will of God that He should be thus delivered. St. Peter doubtless could prove it far more cogently; for he was specially endued with the Spirit for this very purpose, to speak authoritatively and persuasively of the things relating to Christ. But the words are very strong words. They are very remarkable. They are often used to illustrate a remarkable and a difficult point in theology, and they are taken by no means improperly. Christ was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and yet the Jews took Him.

It was the act of the Jews, though it was the counsel of God. And these things, be it remarked, stand over against one another in the whole consideration of matters of the human will, and matters of God's sovereignty. Whatever is done, whatever happens, God foreknows; and what God foreknows, we are constrained to say, God foreordains. Still that does not in any degree affect human responsibility, or human culpability. Nor does it affect our free will, take it in any way you please. If such be the case, we know well, and Scripture bears us out on both sides in this, that we must hold both the one and the other, but we must not attempt to bridge them over and reconcile them together. You will find St. Paul, in one place, speaking in the strongest possible way of the sovereign decrees of God, as if there were no such thing as human responsibility, for the moment, because he is not dealing with it. You will find him in another place speaking as strongly of the human will and of human responsibility, as if there were no sovereign decrees of God, because he is not dealing with them at that moment. But you never find an attempt for an instant to reconcile the two together, with or for our capacities. It is to us just as hopeless to reconcile these two things together, as it is to express in material substance those higher dimensions of mathematical truth which have no representatives to our minds. We cannot do it. We know what is the material interpretation of the first, what of the second, and what of the third dimension, and there we are stopped. We know the truth of God's sovereignty, and we know the truth of our own free will. They are both certain things; they are both real things: but beyond that we cannot see. One day we may be able to do so. There may be wonders in God's creation which reach those higher orders of truth both in worldly science, and in the science of theology.

There is one point in this verse which is worth notice, especially because we have not exactly the strict rendering

in our version, "*ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*" The word "wicked" here is very often taken to give the whole force of the argument of human responsibility. But in fact the genitive case thus rendered applies to the Roman soldiers who had crucified the Lord, and not to the Jews. The expression is, "*ye have taken Him and by the hands of persons without the law, have crucified and slain Him.*" The Romans were not under the Jewish law, but were Gentiles. "You took Him; you gave Him over to the hands of the Gentiles; they crucified and slew Him." So that that word, in fact, does not carry the argument to the whole length for which it is sometimes employed.

"*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death.*" There is a point here of some little difficulty. "Having loosed the pains of death," would seem to be hardly an expression applicable to the raising up of the Lord from the tomb: because we know that the pains of death were over at the moment when He expired, and that it was not from pain that He was loosed, when He was thus raised up, but from the imprisonment and the constriction of death, which bound Him in the tomb. And the words, in fact, in the passage from which this seems to be quoted in the 18th Psalm, are not "the pains of death", but "the *bands* of death". They are called there the *snare*s, or *bands*: "the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the bands of death kept me in". And it was from the bands of death that the Lord was delivered; "*because it was not possible that He should be holden of it*". You see already how the Apostle's views with regard to Christ are deepened and enlightened, and how he is made to see the whole of the truth respecting Him, as far at least as regards that of which he has to speak. "It was not possible that He should be holden of it". How different this is from the day when they did not understand what He meant by the Resurrection from the dead! How different from the day, only a short time before, when the two disciples, of whom Peter was

one, looked into the sepulchre and went away, and knew not that He should rise from the dead! And yet St. Peter now says "because it was not possible that He should be holden of it". Such a difference does it make to have had the Spirit poured upon a man, to have had the Lord of glory, as they had had, explaining to them the things regarding Himself, and laying forth to them the necessities of his humiliation and of his glory.

He now proceeds to prove this point by another quotation from Old Testament prophecy. He brings quotation upon quotation as giving to the Jews a confirmation out of their own Scriptures. *"For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shall make me full of joy with thy countenance.* These words, as is well known, occur in the 16th Psalm, where David is of course first and primarily speaking of his own experience, and his own hopes. But, the Apostle argues, there are many words in this, which will not apply to David himself, and which apply to a greater than David, the Son of David, into whom all prophecy runs up, as it were, as its ultimate subject. *"Let me"*, he says, *"freely speak unto you of the patriarch David"*. He means, I am going to say something respecting him which may seem to you at first sight disrespectful of him, but it is not so. *"Let me freely speak to you of him; namely, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day"*. The sepulchre of David is frequently spoken of, both by the Jewish historian, and here and there in the Scriptures themselves. It was rifled not long before this by King Herod for the treasures which it contained, and is reported to have been destroyed not long after this by an earthquake.

However, St. Jerome writes that at the end of the fourth century it was still an object of curiosity for the pilgrims who visited Jerusalem. The sepulchre was with the Jews; they knew it; David had been buried there, and therefore he was not ascended into heaven: but *"being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne"*. These latter words of the 30th verse are a little incorrect according to the more accurate text. There ought not to be quite so much as that in the verse. *"Knowing that God had sworn to him that of the fruit of his loins he would set some one on his throne"*; those are the literal words: *"of the fruit of thy body shall I set upon thy seat"*. *"He seeing this before spake of the Resurrection of Christ, that his Soul was not left in Hell"—that is, in the grave—"neither his flesh did see corruption"*.

Now then he has proved to them, by this assertion of David, that it was contemplated, that the Scriptures set it before them as a truth, that Christ should be raised again. They themselves understood it so. Almost all those passages in the Psalms and in the Prophets, which we understand of Christ, were so regarded by the Jews even before Christ's coming, as was this passage likewise. They interpreted almost all of them, including the 53rd chapter of Isaiah itself, of the Messiah who was to come. They have since that time altered many of their interpretations, that chapter which I have mentioned, for instance. They will not now recognize the idea that a suffering Messiah was ever contemplated by them. Still so it was at that time; and therefore the Apostle could appeal with safety to them, not merely because it was their view of the subject, but because, being the right view, they themselves had embraced it.

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses": the second proof of his resurrection; the first being prophecy, the second the experience of all us here present; meaning by *"we"* there, himself and the eleven

Apostles especially. There were others doubtless who were witnesses likewise, as we know that there were five hundred brethren at once in Galilee to whom Jesus Christ had appeared, most of whom were probably present on this occasion; but the Apostles were eminently witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.

Then we come to the third point: *"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear"*. This, which you enquire about, the phenomenon of this day, which has excited your astonishment, and the mockery of some of you, is just the act and deed of that exalted Jesus of Nazareth, whom you slew and whom God has raised again. He has shed it forth as the promise of the Father, the one promise of your own Old Testament Scriptures, which He has now received the fulfilment of from the Father. You have seen it and heard it to day, and it is a standing proof of His exaltation and majesty.

"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool". Your own Scriptures confess that the Messiah, be he who he may, and I say he was that Jesus of Nazareth, was to be exalted to the right hand of God; for David spoke those words, which you all well know, not of himself, but of the Messiah to come.

Then he concludes his speech with, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"*. Now the whole of a speech of this kind contains truths so familiar to us, that we forget perhaps to realise in our own minds the extraordinary effect and character of it when it was first spoken. Jesus of Nazareth had been put out of the way; he had been crucified; his course had ended, his blood had been shed; and it might well be thought, and would be thought with the end of any human course of that

kind, that there was an end, as far as success was concerned, of any future trouble, or of his reviviscence under any shape. Doubtless the rulers may have been somewhat disturbed, as indeed in the end of the Gospel of St. Matthew we see that they were, by the report of his being raised again, by the likelihood of it first, and afterwards doubtless by the report. They had taken some means to provide against its spreading, or gaining any sort of credit, if it did spread. More than that we know not. But now here at once comes forth one who had been a follower of this same Jesus, one who was well known to have denied him three times, to have cast him off, and with oaths to have said that he had nothing to do with him; and he stands forth, and by cogent proof from the Jewish Scriptures themselves he makes it known to the Jewish people, that God had exalted that Jesus to be Lord and Christ. We can hardly conceive the effect of such a declaration as that. What the effect was, we reserve until our next occasion to consider.

The boldness of Peter and of the disciples may also excite our astonishment. They were become new men: instead of being scattered abroad each one to his own, leaving their Master alone,—now that He was taunted and rejected of all, they stood forward and boldly proclaimed his name.

But one other matter must be mentioned before we conclude. The character of this speech of St. Peter is a pattern for Christian preaching. He was come to declare, in the most momentous instant perhaps of the Church's existence, the truths upon which the Church rested, and was to be founded and make her progress. What kind of discourse does he utter? We find in it a simple appeal to facts, a simple declaration of what God had done through Jesus Christ, an explanation to them of that which was before their eyes, and of the ground of God's truth. And you may depend upon it, that the main effect of Christian preaching will always consist in the same. It is exceedingly important, and always expedient, that Christian doctrine should be well laid

forth, and the word of God rightly divided: but let not this usurp the place of our testimony to the facts of the Gospel. Perhaps we (it was a reaction probably very natural at the time of the Reformation) have been too much given to dwell upon the purely doctrinal parts of the Christian system, and to forget all that vast and most important testimony to the teaching, and the acts, and the sufferings of Christ, which is contained in our four precious Gospels. It is upon the Gospel facts that the preaching of Christ must ever be founded: doctrine is the building up, but fact is the foundation. May God grant to us to be so founded upon the facts of the Gospel, and so built up in its doctrines, that we may grow together unto a perfect man against the day of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOMILY VII.

CHAPTER II. 37 - 47.

These words, containing as they do the effect of St. Peters first speech or Sermon to Israel, will well be prefaced, in the consideration of them, by just recapitulating in a few words the substance of that speech. The speech was one eminently directed to the Jewish people; the Gospel was to be preached to them first. It was explaining to them, that this wonderful thing which they saw was not the effect of any worldly influence, least of all of that to which the scornors among them had attributed it, but that it was the effect of the Spirit of God, shed down, in accordance with ancient prophecy, by that very person whom they had nailed to a tree and condemned to die a shameful death, even Jesus of Nazareth. This was the sum and substance of St. Peter's speech; and it carried home such conviction to their hearts, pleading as it did with them, gently persuading them, endeavouring to draw them round by reasoning with them about that which by his expositions and his words was the single subject on which the Apostle wished to convince them, that it is said "*they were pierced in their heart*", for such is the word: it is the very word which is used of the soldier who pierced our Saviour's side with the spear; and it is a singular example of that expression, "they shall look upon him whom they have pierced". They themselves were now pierced in heart; just as the prophecy of old Simeon said, when our

Saviour was lying a child in his arms: "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also". The very same sword that is there meant, as we took some pains to explain to you on Christmas Day, the sword namely of conviction, and of repentance, had now pierced through the hearts of these persons. Chrysostom has a good remark here, as he has indeed many good and sound remarks; and it is this,—that if you really want to convince and pierce the heart of an adversary and a contradictor, the way is, to be mild and persuasive, and not to be abrupt and severe. He says, "if you accuse an adversary, you make him excuse himself; but if you excuse your adversary he will begin to accuse himself." And this saying was abundantly exemplified in these words. St. Peter had rather endeavoured than otherwise to excuse them; that is he had spoken to them mildly of that which they had done, they had done it through ignorance—God had appointed it—that indeed was no palliative for them, but still God was ready to receive them: in this man's name was offered to them repentance and remission of sins.

Well, they were thus then, pierced in heart; "*and they said to Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Brethren*"—the same expression as before—men that are brethren—there are no two classes indicated, as I said before, though we have "and" between the words in our version—"Brethren, *what must we do?*" What are we to do? They call, you see, those persons brethren, whom but a little while before they had regarded as impostors and deceivers, and persons of whom it was currently related among them to that day that they had stolen the body of Jesus out of the sepulchre, and given forth a false statement. So completely is the mind altered, so completely is the purpose turned round, by the shafts of conviction entering and piercing the soul.

Well, then, notice also how they give themselves up

into the hands of these people. A few hours before it would have been the very last thought in their minds to refer it to the obscure and disappointed and scattered followers, as they might imagine, of the late Jesus of Nazareth, to tell them what they were to do in life; but now they come to them and they cast themselves, as it were, at their feet, saying, „What must we do?”

We have another notable instance of this, which will come before us in the 9th Chapter, in the case of that great man, great as he was indeed afterward and by the grace of God, but great in character however we take him, who was going forth to persecute Jesus of Nazareth, with his purposes wholly set against him; and Jesus appeared to him, and his heart was pierced, and his whole being struck through by a sort of effect like this; and his first expression was, „Lord what wilt thou have me to do”? And so it ever more is: when a man is convinced, his life is placed at Gods disposal; that is his first thought, „What will God have me to do”?

Well then, what was the answer which the Apostle Peter gave to them? *“Change your minds”*—*“Repent”*. It is well, sometimes, to express words with their simple derivative force. *“Change your minds”*—not, do penance: there is no outward act implied in the word further than the inward state of mind will necessarily and naturally bring about. Change your minds. Your minds have been, with regard to Jesus of Nazareth, that he was an impostor: you have suffered yourselves to be carried on by that thought in opposition to him, till you have apparently outwardly crushed him and put his name out of the world. Well now, change your minds altogether: persuade yourselves that this man was the Christ of God; let the current of your thoughts about him run back to its source—in other words, „Repent;” for repenting is the same thing; it is a turning round of the course of our thoughts and lives. There is no word, perhaps, which is more mistaken, than that simple word, repen-

tance. It is supposed, sometimes, to mean sorrow for sin—and sorrow for sin accompanies it; and doubtless no men could feel more acutely sorrow for sin than these men felt, when their minds were changed about Jesus of Nazareth; and I do not suppose that any one Jew who was living at Jerusalem in those days, who was afterwards a disciple of Christ, would ever to his dying day lose the thought, “It was my cry amongst others that nailed that Saviour to the Cross.” But still it was not mere sorrow for that, in which their change of mind consisted: the whole of their current of thought, and the whole of their endeavour of life, was changed and turned round entirely: and such will our repentance be, if it is good for anything.

Well, but the Apostle says, “Change your minds”, and then remarkably enough (it is a matter that should not be passed over by us) “*Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*”. Now this is a notable passage, for it is the first practical mention of Christian baptism—of that baptism which the Lord had intended as the outward seal of admission into his visible professing Church. And notice the importance which St. Peter gives to it, speaking as he does in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, on this memorable and leading occasion. It is at once an answer to all those who would depreciate or who would vilify the sacraments of Christ. Let us by all means put them in their proper place; and that place is the very first place of all outward acts and ordinances belonging to religion. The one stands at the very threshold of the professing life of the Christian; the other stands at every stage of it, ministering to him, if he be faithful in it, spiritual grace. He is no friend of the spiritual Gospel of Christ, nor to the evangelical doctrines of Justification by Faith, and Sanctification by the Spirit, and Salvation by the merits of Christ alone, who would on any occasion or at any time depreciate or put out of view either of those blessed sacra-

ments of the Lord. But let them stand in their place, and not be moved above their place. They are means of grace, and as means of grace let them ever be accounted. They are not mysterious talismans, to produce a magical effect upon a man; but they are just as the Bible is, are just prayer is, are just as praise is they are means of grace; they are *the leading* means of grace, granted; they are still "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace": and when St. Peter was persuaded that these men were pricked in their heart and were evidently determined to turn to the Lord, then he said to them, "Be baptized every one of you"—be admitted into Christ's outward Church, receiving, as you will—if you follow Christ's appointment, in the fulness of your own spiritual realization of it, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit did not accompany baptism until this moment. The baptism of John was without it. The apostles themselves, in all probability—in fact we may say more than probability, certainly,—never received Christian baptism, because they received the inward spiritual grace, the gift of the Spirit itself, without the outward visible sign. They may have received John's baptism; of that we cannot speak: but the other they certainly did not: and that very circumstance may shew you the proper place of the sacrament itself; that it stands behind and inferior to the reality which is signified by it, though it stands as matter of necessity in those outward observances and acts of obedience which the Christian has to perform.

But there are notable things, yet to be spoken of, respecting this first Christian baptism. It appears to have been simply a baptism in the name of Jesus Christ; in the name of the Messiah; a baptism into the acknowledgment of that one fact. Now our Saviour had said, "Go ye and teach all the Nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost". How are we to explain this, which appears to be a discrepancy at first sight between the practice of the first apostle, who was

here for the first time giving Christian baptism, and the command of our Lord? I believe that the circumstances of the occasion will of themselves sufficiently account for it. All was done on this occasion, as we shall by and by see more at length, in the simplest and most elementary manner. It was not, properly speaking, a constituted Christian Church with its rites and ordinances all in fulness and according to form. These Jews were themselves servants of the God of Israel; they themselves had received the influence of the Holy Spirit, and they saw it at work around them. Of these matters they were convinced. The one fact which was required to admit them into the incipient Christian Church in its infancy was, the acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah; and therefore into that one fact confessed by them they were baptized. "*Be baptized*", then "*for*", in order to, "*the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" I need not dwell longer on these words, because I have already spoken of them as the result of the properly and spiritually received ordinance, by which a man becomes not only an outward professing member but a real member of Christ's Church, and therefore dwelt in by the Spirit of God, that sap of the vine, that ointment poured upon the head, descending to the lowest skirt of the raiment, of which all Christ's spiritual people partake, by union with Him their head.

"*For to you is the promise*"—first of all, "*to you*". That word should be read with emphasis; it comes first in the original verse; "*To you is the promise, and to your children.*" Here, then, he was pointing them onward to the next generation to come. We noticed, in a former Lecture on the Acts, this circumstance; that the immediate arrival of the day of the Lord could not have been contemplated, on account of this word—that the Jews were directed onwards to the promise being to their children; "*To you and to your children, and to all those that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall* summon to approach Him—*shall call* near to Him.

What is meant by these last words? Some say, the dispersion of Israel among the Gentiles; but I think not. The address is to the people of Israel. "To you is the promise", implies the persons to whom St. Peter had previously addressed his sermon, namely, all the House of Israel, and ye that dwell at Jerusalem". So that we must take, I think, "*all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call,*" to mean the Gentiles. And I am confirmed in thus taking it, by the 2nd Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and the 13th verse, where St. Paul uses these words, „Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off", and you will find a reference in the margin to Acts 2. 39", are made nigh by the blood of Christ".

But some say, "Was there not great difficulty in persuading even the Apostles themselves of the truth of the admission of the Gentiles into Christ's Church?" and therefore they object to this explanation of our verse. There doubtless was great difficulty when the time came: but then the objectors forget, that the difficulty was, not the admission of the Gentiles into the Church of God, for every faithful Jew believed, the Prophets had told him abundantly, that the Gentiles should be thus admitted; but the difficulty was, admitting these Gentiles *as Gentiles, in uncircumcision*; and evidently that difficulty was not before the mind of St. Peter when he said these words, by the very words themselves, "To all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall summon to approach him"—*προσκαίσεται*—shall summon to him, namely by means of their becoming proselytes and adopting the true faith of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That was St. Peter's view when he spoke the words, "The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all those Gentiles who are afar off whom the Lord in his providence shall summon near to him". At that time he had not himself any idea (he had not indeed until that Vision which is recorded in the 10th Chapter and the event which the vision represented) that the Gentiles were, *as*

such, without any approach to Judaism, to become members of the Church of Christ. So that there is no difficulty whatever in applying these words to the Gentiles.

"And with many other words did he continue to bear witness and to persuade them, saying, Be saved from this crooked generation". That is to say, he not only gave them that short answer, but he said this to them, "And in order to do this which I have said you cannot remain where you are, dwelling among the Jews, inhabitants of Jerusalem, making one with them, but you must come out and be separate from them, and you must profess yourselves disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; for this generation is a crooked and stiff-necked generation (the very word that is used in the Book of Deuteronomy about them.): this generation is doomed to destruction; it is coming swift upon them—"be saved"—not exactly "save yourselves"—it is the passive verb—be saved—let God save you—out of this crooked generation.

"Then they that gladly received his word"—now we come to the result of what he said,—*"were baptized; and the same day there were added about three thousand souls."* Let us make a few remarks of mere detail, on these circumstances. Three thousand persons were baptized; and yet it is said to us by some, that baptism must necessarily take place by the immersion of the body in water. Now I would ask, how could it have been possible that, in a city so scantily provided with water as Jerusalem, situated as it was upon a steep hill, three thousand persons should have been immersed upon that one day? Is it not almost certain as I take it it is quite certain, at the end of the 10th chapter, where the Gentiles were first formally admitted by baptism, that those persons must have been received by the sprinkling or affusion of water upon them? That may be said to be a mere trifle: but still it is an interesting one, because it has reference to our own practice. The practice is a matter of detail; the fact is, that these three thousand persons were added.

What are we to think of these three thousand persons? We may fairly ask, what are they likely to have been? Now in answering this question, first let us remember the subsequent history of the Jerusalem Church. These persons were all Jews. They were most of them, wery likely, *strong* Jews. They were admitted into the Christian Church at the first fervour of the descent of the Spirit, and in the fervour of their own minds, thoroughly convinced as they were; but they were admitted under the same circumstances as persons always have been admitted into that Church;—that is to say, wheat and tares together. The Church of Christ has never been a pure body of spiritual believers, either on that day or on any other day. Now we know that from the Jerusalem Church sprang up and continued to flourish those evil weeds of Judaistic tendency and prejudice, which disturbed the Apostle Paul during the whole of his ministry, against which we find him testifying so boldly and frankly in that chapter just now read, the 5th of the Epistle to the Galatians, and which existed during the whole of the time of the early Church; appointed indeed by God's Providence for the sifting of the truth, but which brought about so much persecution, so much sorrow, and so much trouble. We may say, then I think, without any fear of being wrong, that among these three thousand there must have been many persons who afterwards were bound in the chains of those Judaising Christians who caused the trouble of which we are speaking. Are we then to look, any the more for that, with sorrow upon such an admission as this? No, no more than we look with sorrow upon any admission into the Church of Christ, be it of the unconscious babe, or be it of the mature adult, who has been sifted as well as human efforts with prayer can sift him, but who so often in both cases turns out to be tares mingled with wheat, as we have said. It was a great and joyful occasion; and if historic truth compels us to say, that of these three thousand we are bound to believe that the seed fell on some of them in stony places, on some

by the way side, on others among thorns, and that it did not bring forth fruit unto life,—yet still on the day of which we now speak, all was as yet promise.

Let us proceed then to read the description of this first Church of believers. It is said, that *they all clave to the teaching of the Apostles and to their fellowship*. Immediately that they became baptized into the Church, they attached themselves permanently to the Apostles. From their mouths they received teaching: they knew very little as yet. The divine command was, "Go ye and teach men, making disciples of them". That, then, was what they put themselves under, and they were punctual and diligent attendants upon that teaching. They also clave to the communion of the Apostles—that is to say, I suppose, (for it is the word *κοινωνία*) that which we call "the Communion of Saints"—the intimate intercourse of frank and spiritual discourse, talking about their common hopes, encouraging one another in their way onward to life. It does not signify,—and you must not make that mistake—in fact few persons of education would be likely to do so—it does not in this first mention of it signify *the Holy Communion*; there is by and by an allusion to that, in other words.

They were then, attached to these things, and to "*the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers*". Now these words are important ones, the first expression especially. What does it mean? From the very first days of the exposition of Scripture, there have been various views about it. Some have said that it was the mere breaking and distributing of bread to the poor. That is hardly likely. Others again have said, and, strange to say, Chrysostom himself is of this number, that it merely means that they lived upon a frugal diet, upon nourishment and not upon luxury: but I think again, that all who look at all at the usage of these words in the Gospels, in the Acts, and in the Epistles likewise, must confess that that meaning is quite inadequate, and that it is one of those places where he has missed the sense. We all know what

it was, when Jesus broke bread and gave it to the disciples. We know that He did it on two remarkable occasions when he wrought a miracle in the doing of it. We know he did it on another occasion still more remarkable, at that last supper before He was betrayed, and that He commanded his disciples to do this in remembrance of Him. Moreover we know that after he had been walking with two of the disciples to Emmaus, and their eyes had been holden that they should not know him,—when He broke bread before them, they knew Him. “He was made known unto them”, says, not St. Luke’s narrative, but another, where it is alluded to, “in the breaking of bread”. Now with all that significance, can we possibly pass over the mention here, that these converts adhered to “the breaking of bread and the prayers”? It must mean I think, and that has been the general sense of the Christian Church with regard to it, the administration of the Holy Communion: and if it does mean that, it is exceedingly interesting to contemplate, that from the very first, as soon as Christ had departed from them into heaven, as soon as the Spirit had been given to them, they met together and they broke bread in the name of the Lord; at first fulfilling even more literally than we now do that command of Christ, to do it whensoever they ate and whensoever they drank, in remembrance of Him. For in the first age, this breaking of bread in the Communion was connected with those meetings together which were called the *agapæ*, or the love feasts; feasts when the poor were entertained at the expense of the rich, and all that was put before them was in common. The administration of the Communion took place at the end of those feasts; and it was only after the abuse which you will find exposed by St. Paul in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, (and we may assume the growing onward of that abuse in after time), that the two were separated, and the administration of the Communion was made to be a part of divine Service, and this other went in course of time out of use. At this time we may well assume, that it accom-

panied their ordinary meetings, and that the breaking of the bread was that Christian act of commemoration of the Lord Jesus, and His body broken and His blood shed for them, which was constantly performed by the Christian Church. *The prayers* mentioned must be understood, by what follows in the third Chapter, and indeed elsewhere, to be the regular hours of prayer in the temple, which they as Jews frequented. We can hardly assume that there was any regular divine Service in the Church, so very nascent and infant as it then was, although it soon grew up: there would be social prayer among the Christians, but no liturgical form of supplications.

"And there was fear upon every soul". That must mean, upon every soul without; because in the 44th verse we have "All that believed were together"; so that it could not be upon them; but there was fear upon every soul without. All Jerusalem saw that something great was doing: the enmity to it had not yet come out, nor will it yet in our history. *"There was fear upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles"*. We must suppose here, that the Sacred historian has somewhat anticipated; he is giving, indeed a description very much the same as that one which occurs at the end of the fourth Chapter; because the first great miracle or sign done by the Apostles was evidently the one done in the next Chapter, the third; that was the first which attracted much attention. He is giving, then, the condition of the Christian Church as it was on this day and some time afterwards. That is implied by the very words themselves; because that they attached themselves constantly to the teaching of the Apostles and the breaking of bread and prayer, would be an assertion requiring some little time to make up its realization.

"And all that believed were together"—constantly in one another's society;—not dwelling together in one house: indeed the numbers would forbid that, though those numbers would very soon be considerably shrunk by the Feast of Pentecost being over, and many, in all

probability the majority of the three thousand, having returned to their own homes. *"All that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need"*. Now this is an important point, which our time will not permit me to go into at great length, but still which is worth giving one or two observations to as we pass. Was this community of goods, so strikingly mentioned here, and again at the end of the fourth Chapter, in any way a constant characteristic, or of necessity for the Christian Church? We may safely answer, certainly not. In the first place, it is only found in the Church at Jerusalem; no trace of its existence is discoverable anywhere else. St. Paul writes Epistles to many Churches; but you will find that in almost all those Epistles he makes mention of the rich and the poor as two distinct classes of believers, just as they are among ourselves. There might be two reasons why it prevailed at Jerusalem: the first, that which gave rise to it, of which we will speak by and by: the second, the constant poverty of the Jerusalem Church. At the time of which we are speaking, the Jewish nation was descending step after step rapidly into wretchedness and degradation, even till that dreadful day came, which swept it, as an outward people with a local habitation, from the face of the earth. In all probability, there was more poverty in Jerusalem than in any other great city of the world at this time; and that may have been a reason why this community of goods seemed absolutely necessary, and was kept up and enforced there more or less. But in the next place, it was not even in Jerusalem enforced by rule. There are two proofs of this. When Ananias and Sapphira came and pretended to throw themselves into this community of goods, and to give up all that they had, St. Peter said to him, "While it remained was it not thine own", to do what thou pleasedst with it, "and after it was sold was it not in thine own power"—was not the money thine own? Another proof

of this is in the twelfth Chapter, where we find that St. Peter was miraculously let out of prison, and went "to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark". So that all the believers had not then sold their houses and goods, for there was one in possession of a house, and entertaining others in it.

Some have supposed that the practice was borrowed from a Jewish sect called the Essenes—an ascetic sect, living lives of strict and austere poverty: but there is no foundation whatever for this; that sect being a totally distinct one from any which had to do with our Lord at all. The Apostles had no feelings in common with it, nor is there any reason to suppose that this practice among them was connected with it. The probability is, that it arose from a natural wish to keep up that community among those believers, which had subsisted among them while our Lord was upon earth. The twelve disciples, and perhaps many others, the women, and probably many who were nearer to his person, and knew more of his teaching, and accompanied Him more frequently, than did the great body, formed one college or community. We know that there was one who kept the bag with the common stock; and it was natural that, when others were added to them, they should like to keep on the same actual community, with the same associations and feelings. This could not long be; God's providence soon pointed out that the church must be scattered—that the church must have her own worldly provision, as well as her own spiritual standard. The practice sank back into the general phases and usages of society, and was given up; and there is no reason to suppose, in fact there is every reason to suppose otherwise, that the Christian is now bound to carry out such a system as this. What we are all bound to do is, not to pride ourselves upon the barriers and distinctions which God has placed between race and race, or between rank and rank in the same race, and not to make them stronger than God has made them; but evermore to

let blessing descend from the higher to the lower, and ourselves to keep up, by practices of self-denial, a community with those below us, as far as is possible.

One characteristic more we have, which repeats indeed some of those which have gone before. "*Day by day*", it is said, "*they were in the Temple with one accord*"—that is, at the hours of prayer. We shall find two of the principal Apostles, at the beginning of the next Chapter, going up to the Temple at one of the hours of prayer. "*And breaking bread at home*", for such is rather the meaning of *κατ' οἶκον* than "from house to house",—and there is no trace of the feasts of which I spoke, the agapæ, having been at any time celebrated by turns at one house and another; they probably met at some specified place, the upper chamber or elsewhere, "*breaking bread at home, they ate their meat*"—they partook of their food—"with gladness, and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people". What a description is this of the state of the Christian Church at first—a sort of foretaste at the beginning, like the infancy of man, a foretaste in simplicity and in joy, of that rest, which is reserved for God's people at last: a foretaste very soon to be broken up, because the church had real work to do, a genuine conflict, for ages, to maintain.

"*And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved.*" The word is simply a present participle, implying those who were in the course of salvation: those persons who were going on, "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation". The word is not one that can be brought in any way for or against the doctrine of final perseverance, or any tenet of the kind: it is a simple matter of fact; those persons who were being saved—whether they were saved or not in each case, we cannot say; some might be, some might not be; some might fall away, others might endure.

Now I have thought that in concluding this remarkable passage, you may perhaps like to hear what was said upon

it by a fervent and eloquent preacher of the Gospel in the great city of Antioch fourteen hundred years ago; and that was St. Chrysostom; dealing with a congregation, not perhaps differing in many respects, though differing, as you will see from these words, in some habits and some associations, from those amongst whom our work is now carried on, and who are addressed and exhorted on similar topics. "What", he says, "was it that induced those three thousand forthwith to choose the right path? How came they all at once filled with such true Christian wisdom, whereas now hardly a man is so filled in the course of years? What made them so earnest and awakened? What lighted them so suddenly into a flame? It was, because they came to the matter with simplicity—with conviction of heart; because there were no honours and preferments to be gained by religion as now; because they looked to future weal, and not to present advancement. For this is the earnestness of the soul; to dwell, and to work, and to turn about, in the realities of peril and of conflict. This they thought to be Christianity. But not so we: we seek our ease from our profession of the Gospel; we want to advance ourselves in the world, or to quiet our consciences; and thus we shall miss its blessings when we most need them. What must we do? asked they in their self condemnation. You on the contrary are ever asking, What shall we be doing in the business of this world,—and in display before your contemporaries, and in your personal pride. They did that which beseems converts, you the very opposite. They accused themselves; they anxiously doubted of their salvation; this was the reason why they were such as they were. They knew how great a gift they had received. But how can you do so, who are the opposites in every respect? They heard and were baptized; and yet they had never heard half the doctrines of the faith, but only these words, that Jesus was the Christ, and, Come out from this generation. Yet this did not render them slow to action; but they were

persuaded, and they shewed it by what they did. They descended into the contest at once. They stripped off their wordly garments. But you if you contend at all, you must fight with all your trappings about you. Therefore it is that your enemy has so little trouble. You stumble and are entangled in your own trains, and fall an easy prey to him. This is your way: you and the foe meet together in the conflict of life; he is like a wrestler ready for the fray, well versed in the play, dusty, and sunburnt, and soiled, and stripped; and you yourselves are scented with unguents, and in silken garments, and gilded sandals, and jewelled head-dress, and yet you go in and grapple with him. Why, not only are you sure to be encumbered and to be foiled, but from the very beginning all your care is about not soiling and tearing your costly raiment; and so at the very first close, you will fall and be lost. It is the time for the conflict, and art thou clothing thyself in silks? It is the hour of the grapple, and art thou like one preparing for a procession of triumph? Look not at the things without, but at the things within; and remember that cares of this sort bind the soul down as with cords all round; she cannot lift a hand for herself, but only lifts them hopelessly in token of yielding to the enemy".

May we translate this fervent language, brethren, into that of our own temptations, and our own necessities, and remember that if we are to go forth and to battle in this ninth hour of the Kingdom of God, even as these converts did in its first hour, we must, as they did, descend into the conflict with humility, and earnestness, and total self-renunciation, and must not try to keep both worlds at once, but cast away all that we have, and come to Jesus.

HOMILY VIII.

CHAPTER III.

It will hardly be possible in our exposition of to day to embrace the whole of this chapter. At the same time, it is not easy to find a point for pausing anywhere: and I thought it far better to set before you the whole of this discourse of St. Peter, as we shall have occasion to speak of it as a whole.

We have here the first great miracle vouchsafed by our Lord in the power of his Spirit after his ascension into heaven: the first miracle of the son of God done by his servants, after the great miracle of the dispensation, the effusion of the Spirit. Now we may presume to say, that it was necessary, at this time, that such a miracle should be wrought; in other words, we can see the propriety of God's dealing in bringing out such a miracle at such a time. As yet the church had been made up of individual converts, of those that were being saved, of those that were in course of salvation. They were called in one after another, and they flocked together: they were concentrated at the same point, and they joined the Apostles. We had a delightful account, at the end of the last chapter, of the harmony that reigned, and of the self-denial of the believers in Christ, at this time. It seemed to us like the freshness of early morning, which indeed could not last, because there was the burden and heat of the day to be borne, and other works, on a wider scale, for the church to do. Now, this wider scene opens. It was necessary that these

should be testified to the *people of Israel*: not to those merely who ran together upon the rumour of a great thing having happened in the day of Pentecost: but it was necessary that there should be manifested to the whole people of Israel the power of God by his servant Peter, and this was the occasion. Peter and John, the last time we read of them together, were running together to the sepulchre in weakness of faith, not knowing of those things which were to happen, and not being aware that Christ should rise from the dead. Now we find them going into the Temple, at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. The hours of prayer commonly with the Jews, the times of offering morning and evening sacrifice, were at the third hour in the morning, and the ninth hour in the afternoon, i. e. at the hours of nine and three; and also at noon; morning, noon-day, and evening. They frequented the Temple at the hour of prayer: indeed we may believe, though it is not asserted so, but from the analogy of a variety of facts in the acts of the Apostles, that both the Apostles and the Christians at Jerusalem, observed the Jewish Festivals, and hours of prayer, and such things as were not inconsistent with their character and standing, as long as the City and Temple of Jerusalem endured: and they would especially do so at this early time, when the Gospel was as yet Israelitish alone.

They were going up together to the Temple; and there was there a certain lame man, doubtless well known to all of those who frequented the times of prayer. He was ordinarily *carried* to the Temple, and he went to beseech alms; and this, as Chrysostom shrewdly observes, was a sign of the genuineness of his affliction in his lameness; otherwise, being a beggar, he would not have consented to share his scanty earnings with those who carried him thither. And thus the genuineness of the miracle that was wrought upon him seems to be further demonstrated by the very circumstances of his suffering. He was carried, and his bearers placed him day by day at the gate of the Temple called

the Beautiful one. It is in total uncertainty, which of the gates of the Temple it was, as the description might apply to two or three; but for obvious reasons, they placed him there, in the concourse of those entering, to solicit alms. He saw Peter and John going into the Temple; and no thought probably was in his mind, except that of asking alms of them as of other persons; and no thought perhaps was in their minds, when they were going to the Temple at the hour of prayer; but the Holy Spirit put into their minds a thought, and into their hands the power. The lame man asked for alms; and *Peter, looking upon him with John, said, "Look on us": and he took heed of him, expecting to receive something.* As yet, all on the part of the recipient was secular, and his expectation was excited by the words "Look on us". He thought they were going to enter into conversation with him, and that the result would be his receiving charity from them. Peter said, *"Silver and Gold have I none"*. But it may be said,—How then do we read, at the end of the second chapter, that they had all goods in common among the believers, and that there was a public stock, out of which was dispensed charity to those who stood in need of it? Had not St. Peter the command of that public stock? How then could he say, *Silver and Gold have I none?* The answer to that is easy. St. Peter is speaking, not of his office, as an authoritative dispenser of the alms of the church, but of himself. He means to say, I am not rich; I cannot afford to give you what you ask for.

Now are we right in saying, that up to this time all had not been quite secular on the part of the man? Evidently it was so up to the last verse. But there is a process now going on, beneath the surface of the narrative, which must be understood to have excited something like faith or expectation on the part of the man, otherwise upon the declaration contained in those words, *"Silver and Gold have I none"*, he would have turned away from those who were so unprofitable to him, either by a scornful look, or gesture,

indicating that all he had to seek from them was now over, and past by; but this not being so, St Peter proceeds, "*But such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk*". Now these are wonderful words, on all accounts. No name could be in greater contempt, among the authorities of Jerusalem, than that of "Jesus Christ of Nazareth"; or even, to put it more strikingly, by using the literal adjective of the original, "*the Nazarene*;" for not only had they, from the first, despised him, as an inhabitant of an obscure town in Galilee, but hatred had been added to that contempt, and they had blotted him out, they had wiped him from the face of the earth, as one infamous and disgraced by his shameful death; and into the very centre of this, not simply unpopularity, but hatred and contempt, St. Peter brings this hated name "Jesus Christ of Nazareth". The contrast is as strong as possible; it is not in the name of the Son of God, not in the name of the Messiah, the King of Israel, not in the name of the son of David, but, in the name of that despised and crucified one "*Jesus the Nazarene*"; who, at the same time, is the Messiah of Israel. Here was a testimony as bold as could possibly be: and the effect of it, the power dwelling in that Name, was soon manifested. "*And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up*". This was the practice of our Lord himself—but it was a practice well worthy of our attention, because everything is well worthy of our attention, that traces the progress of faith in the recipient, in a miracle of this kind. "He took him by the right hand, and lifted him up." When the man heard the words, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk", had he been a despiser of Jesus Christ, and therefore alien from that which he heard, he would again have rejected them, and have said, as, sometimes some in his situation have said, when religious tracts have been given to them, "What good can this do me? I want not anything that that name can bestow". But he did not this. And "*raising him up by*

his right hand" implies that he stretched out his hand, that he was worked upon by faith, when the Apostle raised him up. And thus you see, as in almost every case, in the miracles, of our Lord and his Apostles, faith in the receiver first. "*He took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength*"—were made firm: His lameness left him, and you may almost observe what his lameness, or ailment was: it seems as if he had lost the use of his legs, and they were now made firm: he was able to stand on them, and to walk—"*And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God*". The natural understanding of these words is, that he exulted in his newly regained strength. Some have said indeed, that his walking was at first imperfect, he not having walked from his mother's womb, and that he knew not how to exercise that power. It seems more likely, that it was from the exultation of his spirits; that he was thankful to God, and took this way of praising Him for the freedom which he had so unexpectedly received.

Now then we have the *effect* of this miracle; and, before we pass on to it, just let me say a few words as to its significance. We know very well that not a single miracle in Scripture is a mere wonder; every one of our Lord's miracles contains at the same time the teaching of a parable; and so it is with those which were wrought by his Apostles; though of course in an inferior degree, still each of them in their place carried the teaching of a parable. This miracle had a deep significance. The gospel was at this time being preached to Israel; and Israel was bound, like this poor man, with all its power and faculties cramped, and narrowed, in servitude to ignorance and to sin; and there was One come, who was to set Israel free, and cause Israel, like this poor man, to walk, to leap, and to praise God; to open the eyes of the blind, and give strength to the weak, the paralysed, and the infirm. No miracle could have been

more significant of that which was to be done, and of the power to do it. It has also a significance with regard to ourselves. We are now the Israel of God. The mercies of God have now passed out from their narrow channel of promise to the direct seed of Abraham, into the boundless ocean of the Gentile world, of whom we form part. Are we, like this poor man, lame and incapacitated? Yes, even so. We confess ourselves to be "tied and bound by the chain of our sin;" we pray that God's mercy may "set us free". There is therefore in this parable a lesson for us, as well as for Israel.

The effect of this miracle was soon manifest. The very gesture, and loud praises of this man in the Temple,—as he walked, and leaped, and sung, being filled with the spirit of joy and thanksgiving, would naturally attract persons around him, to see who he was; and on coming, they recognized the man who had been lame, and whom they had seen daily at the gate of the Temple. Many of them had seen him for years; for he was forty years old, and he had been cast *daily* at the gate of the Temple: *and, we read, they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him*"—And while he was holding the hands of Peter and of John, "*all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering*".

Now before commenting on St. Peter's address to them, let me remark upon some points of difference which exist between this and the discourse in the last chapter; for everything is valuable, which points out to us distinctly the progress of the faith, and the reason of God's Spirit having put certain words, at certain times, into the mouths of his servants. The discourse in the last chapter, on the day of Pentecost, proceeded on a scornful misunderstanding, or perhaps not a misunderstanding, but only a scoffing, which seemed to influence the hearers; for they had said, that the effect of the Spirit on the servants of God was produced by physical intoxication. And upon that point St. Peter goes forward, and

in his discourse, although it is one of comparative mildness, considering the circumstances existing between the two parties, yet still there is some savour of severity, and it ended in their being "pricked in heart", or rather "pierced through the heart", crying out, "Men and brethren what shall we do"? This discourse, on the other hand, proceeds upon the fact which they have seen, and the effect on their own minds respecting it. There is not anything of hostility between them and the Apostle, who spoke with simplicity upon their expressing their astonishment and wonder upon a wrong subject, and directed them to the right subject for them to look at, and not to *his* having been the cause of this great act: and upon that, he unfolds to them that which God had done, and that which he was doing for them, by means of his exalted, and glorified servant Jesus. "He is then", as Chrysostom well expresses it, "in this discourse no longer controverting; it is not a polemical discourse; but he has them under his hand by means of the miracle; he is now a teacher, not a disputer"; bear that in mind. "*And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel*"; and notice how, in all these early discourses, in the last one, as well as in this, in the beginning, and throughout the argument to the conclusion, the fact of *Israel* is brought out; they were all strictly *Jewish*; it was the first preaching of the gospel to the people of the Jews, and it was the Lord Jesus, after he had been raised from the dead, and had ascended into heaven, coming again into *his own*, to try whether his own would receive him. And therefore it is, that we find such stress is laid upon the word. It is not merely "men and brethren", but "men of Israel": the Apostles seem determined to keep them in mind of their peculiar position as God's people, and they repeat this on every occasion.

"*Ye men of Israel, why wonder ye at this man*"? why does this man excite such a commotion among you, or why do you fix your eyes upon *us*, as if it were that by our

own power or holiness we had caused him to walk, this being the effect of faith"; for they still naturally supposed that the hand which had grasped the infirm man was the hand that had conferred strength upon him; and they seemed as if they would have worshipped the Apostles themselves, or have regarded them as some great prophets, as men endowed with more than ordinary power, raised up among them. St. Peter's object is to disclaim all this, and to shew the people that they were nothing; that they inherited the same Spirit, which their forerunner, the Lord, had upon Him, and that, as He declared he did nothing of himself, so it was with them; they were merely tools or instruments in the hands of the God of Israel, who had raised up his servant Jesus. "*Why look ye so earnestly upon us? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our Fathers*"—notice again, how he places himself in the very centre of Israelitish associations, of Jewish views and thoughts, and hopes; he does not make out God to be a different God: and how the ancient gnostics ever got over such a speech as this I am not aware, who held that the God of Israel in the old Testament was another God from ours—"The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob", he repeats, "*the God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied him in the face of Pilate, when he would have set him free*". I read it to you, as usually the second time in these expositions, literally from the original, as giving the force of the strict tenses of the verbs, which are very often rather confused in our version. An instance of such confusion is found in this rendering, "the God of our Fathers *hath glorified* his son Jesus"; by which it seemed as if St. Peter meant, that this miracle was the glorification by God of his son Jesus. It means, "the God of our fathers raised up and glorified Him", he states *merely the historical fact*; you denied Him, God glorified Him; *this is not his glorification that you now see before you, but, as a fact, God did glorify Him, and as a conse-*

quence, He hath shed forth this power to-day. God glorified then his *servant* Jesus: and this is another important point to keep in view; He glorified, not his *son*; that is not the word—the word *παῖς*, here used, is one used uniformly in Isaiah, and in the Septuagint version, from which the Apostles always quote: and there are several instances. Take one, from the 49th chapter of Isaiah and the 6th verse,—“And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles”;—and in that remarkable passage in the 52nd, and in the 53rd chapter, the word is brought in, and most likely it is to this which St. Peter refers, “Behold my servant shall deal prudently”—And then in the 53rd chapter, “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” So the prophecy goes on, through that remarkable chapter, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous *servant* justify many.” God then *glorified his servant Jesus*, Him whom he appointed to be the intercessor for Israel, the High Priest for Israel, God glorified Him: you gave him up, although even a Gentile Judge was willing to set him free, but you denied that holy and just one, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and you killed the Captain of life—The word is the same as in chapter v, xxxi, “Him hath God exalted to be a prince and a Saviour”, which will throw a light upon it; and as in the second chapter of Hebrews, where the words are, (10th verse). “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto salvation, to make the *captain* of their salvation perfect through sufferings”. There is the same word again in the 12th chapter of Hebrews, where it is said, we are to look unto Jesus “the *author* and finisher of our faith”; Him then who was the *author* of life, the *captain* of life, and the *Prince* of life, a very good word; you have it, that they had actually *killed* the Prince of life,

however great the paradox may seem. "See what you have done: you have taken Him who was the author, the origin, the fountain of life, and put Him to death; whom God raised from the dead; of which fact we are witnesses; we saw it with our eyes. What better witnesses could there be, than those who were together at the Sepulchre? They saw, and they believed, that God had raised Him from the dead. *"And, they said, faith in his name hath strengthened this man whom you see and know"*; and it was faith in his name which has caused this connection between ourselves and him, by virtue of our believing in him, and being united to him by faith". There may have been also an allusion of course to the faith of the *man himself*; but what they would probably dwell upon most in their discourse to the people, would be, the source of their own power of healing, which the hearer had mistaken, viz that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, faith, and not our power or holiness, has given to this man this perfect soundness in the presence of you all; that it was which produced the effect, no power of ours, so that you should wonder at *us*.

From this point, he proceeds to excuse them, and the spirit is very like that in the former discourse. Do not on this account think that all is hopeless. You did this, but still you did it in ignorance, you and your rulers and even the very worst of them, did it in some sense in ignorance. *"I wot that through ignorance you did it."* Does not this speech put us in mind of that speech of Joseph, when his brethren recognized him at last in Egypt, and when they accused one another, and they thought that great danger was now come upon them,—*"charge not yourselves with this that has been done, it was God who did it, to bring me into Egypt to save much people alive"*. And so it is ever with those who are servants of God, so it was with the Lord Jesus himself; they are ever ready, even in the greatest cases of unworthiness, in the worst cases of hostility to themselves, to invent charitable, kind, and gentle ex-

cuses, verifying the saying of Chrysostom which we quoted last Sunday, that if you excuse your adversary you make him accuse himself, but, if you accuse him, you make him excuse himself. This line St. Peter took on both these occasions; and it may serve as an example to us on all similar occasions. *"I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers"*; but *something else was being done*, not only your ignorant act; it was not merely a pity, that you put to death so just a man, but in all this God fulfilled the things which He had previously announced by the mouth of all his prophets, that is, that Christ should suffer. This was the testimony, the apostle tells us, given by the mouth of all his prophets. If we do not find it very frequently in the old Testament, but only in some few places, it is merely because we cannot penetrate far enough beneath the surface. We see it in the types of the law, and in the Psalms, for example in the 22^d and 69th, in the 53^d of Isaiah, and here and there it appears in other places; but we have here the testimony of the Spirit through St. Peter, that it was by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ is declared as the suffering Messiah: *"Repent therefore, and turn your course, be converted, in order that your sins may be wiped out"*. It was not a hopeless case, though many of those persons had themselves cried out *"Crucify Him"*; though many of them scorned, and scoffed against Him, beneath the cross; it was not a hopeless case, if they repented, and changed their minds and turned their course. It is well to analyze these common words, and to precipitate their meaning, to see what it is: *"Change your minds, and turn your course, that your sins may be blotted out"*.

We now come to another of those passages, where we of the English version have mistaken, in our words, not only a small matter, but a great one. The original means, —and if you were to call together all the scholars in England not one would differ in this matter,—that your sins

may be wiped out, *in order that* times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord". The word which I have rendered "*in order that*" never did, and never can possibly mean *when*, or anything like it, which the English version has here. Those who are acquainted with the original, well know that it means "*in order that*". Now, what do the words of the passage mean? They have a very important and interesting meaning. "*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, in order that times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the World began.*" Now there may be some doubt and difficulty in this. It appears as if the repentance of the sinner hastened the grace and mercy of God, which is to come, and as if the non-repentance of sinners was an obstacle to that grace and mercy. Repent and be converted, *in order that* those blessed times of refreshment, for you who are weary, and heavy laden, those times of grace and mercy, which are prophesied, may come. And yet this is the constant language of scripture. "Haste thee, and fly thither, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither". "He could not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief": and we have many other texts of the same kind. It is a condescension on the part of God to our ways of thinking and speaking, so to speak of Himself. In the same view, the restoration of Israel was to be an event preceding the coming of these times of refreshment which shall accompany the sending back of the Lord Jesus and the "restitution of all things" here spoken of; "Repent and be converted, in order that those times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord". The Apostle knew,—for his Master had taught him, in speaking of the things concerning his Kingdom, and the close connection of

the two events, the one with the other,—he knew very well, that if Israel would be converted, this refreshment would immediately come; what he *did not* know was this, which the providence of God has enabled *us*, after long ages, and looking upon the past, to be aware of,—that centuries of unfolding of the divine purposes were yet to come—though we know no more than he did as to the future—he knew not how long, or short a time would elapse, neither the day, nor the hour; and no man knows this, not the angels in Heaven, nor even the Son himself, but the Father only. The Apostle spoke just as he would have spoken at any time, and even now would have spoken, “Repent and be converted, that the Kingdom of Christ may come”. It was one of the most powerful arguments for those who had to address the people to use to any sinners, you are hindering the course of God; and strange as it may seem, and wonderful, you stand in the way of His gracious purposes”.

The time has passed on so swiftly, that what I expected has happened; we have no chance of being able to discuss the important points contained in these verses, to-day. We will therefore pause at this point; and the more readily so, because the beginning of the 4th chapter is intimately connected with the end of this discourse, if indeed the discourse was not broken off by it: and we shall treat the remaining part of the chapter on a future occasion, if we are spared.

We have had before us a lesson of the way in which God was pleased first to preach the gospel to his chosen people the Jews, before making it known to the Gentiles; and how was that? It was by the signal deliverance of the poor crippled man, who served to them as an emblem of their own people. And He has the same deliverance in store for all those to whom He sends the gospel. Now however we are tied and bound, whatever weakness we have in our own moral nature, and I am sure we have

plenty wherever we turn our regards,—there is One who is able to heal it, and able to strengthen us, and who comes to us for that purpose. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”, is the language now used to every impotent sinner, who is unable to save himself, or to raise himself up, from death in sin, unto life in righteousness.

There is another thing to be observed, which interests us here ; and that is, the situation of the Apostles themselves at this time. The anecdote is probably well known to many of you, that one of the Popes, who was celebrated, above all the rest, for the magnificence of his life, when taking a friend over his palace, and displaying his treasures, said to him “You see it cannot now be said silver and gold have I none”, whereupon his friend replied, “No, nor can it be said, “Rise up, and walk”. The state of the church is changed, not only in that, its earthly high place, Rome, but every where, since those days. Let us take care that the change be not one destroying all power in the church; let us take care that the silver and gold eat not out all power of the spirit. Though supernatural power has passed away, the words may be regarded in another point of view. That people to whom the gospel then was preached have become doubtless,—in the providence of God, watching in a strange and remarkable way as it has ever done, even in their degradation, over the progress of that people,—have become now, no longer the poor, despised, and afflicted in outward circumstances, but the depositaries of by far the greater part of the wealth of this world; those to whom Kings have recourse, when they want to borrow for the expences of their kingdoms. They are the holders, and dispensers, of untold wealth. Let us, the Christian Church, look forward to the time when we may be able to say to them,—and let me remind you that it depends upon us when that time arrives, “silver and gold we have none”, ~~nor~~ do you want it, “but what we

have, we give to you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk". Let us press forward that in this and all other blessed results of missionary labour, that the times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord; and O! may we all in that day be found with his people in our place, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

HOMILY IX.

CHAPTER III. 19—26. IV. 1—12.

We left off, in our exposition of last Sunday, in the middle of the discourse of St. Peter to the people of Israel, on the healing of the lame man, at the beautiful gate of the Temple. We had indeed advanced some way into the exposition of this 19th verse; when we were obliged to conclude. It may therefore be well to remind you of what we had said upon that verse; and the principal thing of which we may require reminding is, that there is in that verse one of the instances, (few indeed there are certainly, but none the less undoubted), in which our translators have mistaken the sense of the original text, and rendered a Greek word by an English one, the meaning of which it will by no means bear. I told you on the former occasion that the only rendering which any number of scholars would agree to, of that verse, would be this, „Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”. The word which the translators have rendered “when” never bore that meaning, and cannot do so, especially in such a connection, and there is indeed nothing to be surprised at in this, because the scriptures always represent our unbelief, our hardness of heart and our unwillingness to receive God’s mercies, as being hindrances to those mercies; as may be seen in various other passages. And reading it thus, *that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*” WHAT ARE the times of refreshing?

There have been various opinions about it. Some have said that "the times of refreshing" merely mean spiritual refreshment, by the conversion of mens, souls; but this construction I think, if we regard the context, it is utterly impossible to understand. The times of refreshing here spoken of are intimately connected with the sending of Jesus Christ, "*And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you*". How the original word, *ἥτις*, "that," is rendered, will affect the meaning of the whole of these clauses; "that the times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord,—that he may send Jesus Christ to you, which was preached before to you, or "predetermined to you"; there is some little doubt here as to the meaning, for *which* the word stands in the original text, whether for "preached before", or "determined before"; but this is not an important difference. These "times of refreshment then", are intimately connected with the *second coming* of the Lord Jesus, and therefore must mean, as indeed they have been generally understood to mean, the great times of refreshing from the weariness, and the misery of the world; the times when the Lord Jesus shall appear with his saints, and when tears shall be wiped away from all eyes. These words carried with them a deep and interesting meaning to the Jews. They were living under a state of great oppression; they were living under the Roman yoke, not indeed of itself oppressive, for it was for the most part a yoke of justice, and to the Romans we owe the foundation of many of our own just and happy laws; but the Jews were a turbulent and rebellious people, and they were always giving more and more trouble, to their Conquerors and Rulers; and in consequence they were almost obliged to rule the Jews with an oppressive hand; and so much worse did it soon become, that their city, having rebelled against the Roman power, was, as we all know, razed to the ground, and their name destroyed, as a people dwelling in their own land. These "times of refreshment" then, would bear to the weary Jews a welcome sound of invitation, and would promise

rest for which they longed: and probably for this reason it may have been, that the Apostle used them. It was an unusual expression, and is only to be found in this place in the New Testament.

And these "times of refreshment" are said to "come from the presence of the Lord", in the same solemn way of speaking as in the second chapter of St. Luke, "And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus". We say that anything proceeds from the presence of a King, who decrees or declares. "*And He shall send Jesus*". Then there is a difference between the two words, with respect to the next passage. Those who understand the original will easily appreciate what it is. Many of our scholars read *προεχειρισμένον*, "before determined", and many others read *προεκηρυγμένον*, "before preached". The difference is very small in the word itself, or in the sense, between the two. We may take them both as implying a decree of God; one indeed would assert, that Jesus had been before, and all through time, predetermined by God: the other, that Jesus had been before preached to them by the Prophets; this latter would declare simply a matter of fact, and the other, the counsel of God. Jesus, he who has been before preached (or determined) to you, *Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution come, which times God spoke of by the mouth of his holy prophets from the beginning of the world.* It is said, that the heaven must receive Jesus; some had rather say, for the words will admit of both renderings, "who must receive the heaven," thinking it beneath the dignity of the Lord Jesus, that even heaven would receive Him; but I think it is quite unnecessary to make a difference. The heaven receiving the Lord, is to my mind the more solemn, and majestic expression. We know that the heavens are always looked up to, as something exalted, as something dignified, as the habitation of God, and therefore far above us. Thus the heavens bow down to the Lord Jesus, and receive him as their Lord and

Master, up to a certain time; *"whom the heaven must receive till the times of restitution of all things"*. The explanation of this will be best derived from our Lord's own words in Matt. xvii. 11. After his transfiguration, He was speaking to his disciples about Elias. They first asked him, "Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come"? He answered, and said, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already; and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed". Then if we want an explanation of that expression, we shall find it in the prophecy from which it is quoted, at the end of Malachi, where the prophet Elijah, the forerunner of our Lord, is to be sent, and where it is said "he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse". He shall turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. This is the great restitution here spoken of; but not only this; it extends not only over the hearts of men. It was begun by the forerunner of the Lord in preparing his way, but He carried it on himself, throughout all his ministry on earth, and his Apostles carried it on after Him, and his ministers are carrying it on now, and it shall never be completed, till the great restoration actually comes, when human nature shall be lifted up out of the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. That is "the time of the restitution of all things", which have been spoken of, and sung of from the beginning. Take even the history of the fall of man: you hear there the strain for the first time; you hear that the seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. There is the restitution spoken of, and it follows on, throughout the whole of the prophets, historically; in the old Testament, you will find it, always pointing to this great restitution of all things. Now let us take care not to mistake these words. We are not to suppose, from them, that all imaginable things are to be restored,

and put back into their state of innocency, and their state of sinlessness. We are not to imagine, for the Scripture no where gives us any ground for that, that those who have rejected the Lord, and have lived ungodly lives, will be restored back again. The words "all things" are used as we very frequently find "all men" used, that is, as neglecting or putting aside all the exceptions, which must be always understood in the minds of those who read; as we read often in St. Paul "all men" will be this or that, "all" shall do this or that, meaning all Christians, all the people of God, all followers of God, all who follow out that normal and straight-forward intention which God had in the design of redemption for all those who seek Him. This time of restitution then will be the limit of the heaven holding the Lord Jesus. He will then come from the heaven; and observe the correspondence with the declaration in chap. I., as to his second coming; we find there "this same Jesus shall so come out of heaven", and, in like manner, here the Apostle has asserted that he will come from heaven at that glorious time.

"For Moses truly said". Then the Apostle proceeds to quote the law. And this is one of the great examples of his regard to the Jewish people; because they, holding the words of Moses in great veneration, would listen with more attention to that which he said to them upon that point than to anything else. *"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you; And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people".* We have before dwelt on his prophecy, and I will not do so again now; but it was always understood by the Jews, not as they profess now to understand it, I believe, of the whole range of the prophets who should rise up after Moses, each of which should have this authority upon him, and of each of which it might be said, whoever would not hear him should be cut off from the people. And it might be truly


said, that the prophecy had a partial fulfilment in that long procession of prophets: but they never in the old times so interpreted it, but as always it is interpreted by Christians, of a great prophet, "the Prophet"; and they generally identify this prophet with the Messiah, but not always. In the first chapter of St. John, they ask the Baptist whether he was the Christ, *or the Prophet*, thereby shewing that they asked the question regarding them as two distinct persons. *And moreover, all the prophets, from Samuel, and those that followed him, as many as spoke upon the subject, declared and announced these days which have now begun, the days which shall terminate in the restitution of all things, the days of the second dispensation, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.* The word "these days" shews that here the apostle does not allude to those future days, the days of restitution of all things in their completion, but *these days which have already begun, the days you are living in, the days in which we call you to repentance; those are the days of which all the prophets have spoken from the first.* We cannot quite say why *Samuel* is here introduced, except as being the first of a great class of prophets, beginning, as to the books of Scripture, with David. It may be possible, that some of the Psalms may have been penned by Samuel; but we know not. We have no writing or saying in which he directly prophecies these days, or anything else. So that he most likely is mentioned as heading the rank of the Prophets in the time of David. "*Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed*". I reminded you before in this sermon of St. Peter of its exclusively Jewish character, its address to the people of Israel. All these things that I say unto you are your inheritance; if you choose to reject them, reject them; but they are *yours*, you are the sons of the Prophets, and inheritors of all these promises; this covenant which God made, yours: and by means of you, the seed of Abraham, it is

God's intention to bless all the families of the earth. And indeed that intention was not frustrated, because the Apostles were Jews, the Lord Jesus himself was a Jew, and by means of him, and the declaration of Him by his Apostles, are all the families of the earth to be blessed. Then he goes on to say, *"Unto you first God, having raised up his servant Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities"*. Remember what we said respecting the word "servant" before. It is not his "Son", but his "servant". The word is used in reference to the prophecies of Isaiah; the word "servant" is there used. *God having raised up*, not from the dead, but brought into life, brought forward, *having raised up his servant Jesus, sent him, blessing you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities*. The very purpose for which God sent his servant Jesus, was to bless the Jewish people, not by raising them to a kingdom, not by giving them great and unexpected advancement, but by turning every one from his iniquities.

It appears to me that the speech is here broken off. The first words of the 4th Chapter appear to indicate that, while they were speaking to the people, the priests, and the captain of the Temple, set upon them, before the conclusion of all that St. Peter had to say. I may say at once, that it is easy enough to find a context where we wish to find it, and it is easy enough to make an elaborate arrangement, and shew that the conclusion was at this verse, but it seems to me more natural to suppose, that he was going to say more; to believe that after the expression which I read to you, "Unto you first God", he was about to state something more; that the context of the passage would be;" It is for you like this lame man, to sing the praises of God first, and lead the great chorus of creation. God sent his son to the Jew first, but also to the Gentile. If a difficulty be raised, because St. Peter was not aware of God's purpose with regard to the Gentiles, you will remember what was said in a former one of these expository Lectures, that it was never any

secret to the Apostles that God intended to take the Gentiles into his church, but what was a secret was, that they were to be taken in *as Gentiles*, uncircumcised. That they were to be taken in, the Prophets declared again and again, and therefore St. Peter says "Unto you *first*", but he clearly had in his mind, in the background, "and to the Gentiles" afterwards; and, if it be as I have supposed, at this point they were interrupted.

Now here is the first open outbreak of hostility against the preaching of the Christian faith on the part of Israel. Hitherto we have met with nothing of the kind, but some mocking. They said, "these men are full of new wine". But the power of the Gospel had been so irrefragable, that none dared to lift up his hand against it. Now it appeared that there must have been a combining together of the authorities against the preaching of the faith, as there was against the Founder of it, and as there was against the Apostles. And all these rise up together, and they come up upon them. The word, as originally used, means coming suddenly upon them, rushing upon them "*Being grieved that they taught the people, and that they preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead*". That they preached, *in the name of Jesus*, the resurrection from the dead. They would not be grieved that they preached the resurrection from the dead; because that doctrine every Pharisee among them would concur in; but that they connected that future blessing, which every true Jew believed, with the name, the despised and hated name, of Jesus of Nazareth; that they preached *in the name of Jesus* the resurrection from the dead. They were perhaps also aggrieved by the mere fact of their teaching the people at all. They were ignorant men and had no business to teach the people, not being uplifted to the chair of the scribes or Pharisees. "*And they laid hands upon them and put them in hold until the morning, for it was now evening. Howbeit "or" notwithstanding all this*", many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men



was about 5000". We do not quite know whether we are to believe that this is an addition of *new* converts, or whether it is the *whole church*; most probably the latter; there may indeed have been this number of additional new converts, as the result of this second sermon of Peter: But the number is so large as to make it more likely, that it is that of the whole church which is here intended "*And it came to pass on the morrow that their rulers, and elders, and scribes*", that is, the rulers, and elders, and scribes of *these men*, the Jews; the word "*their*" is put in to keep up the connection, as every thing here has reference to the acceptance or rejection of the apostles by the Jewish people: therefore it is that such little things are found here. You are everywhere reminded that they were the Jewish rulers and the people of Israel. "*And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas*",—before both of whom the Lord himself was brought, first before one, and then before the other—*and John, and Alexander*",—evidently some of the High Priest's family—"and as many as were of the kindred of the High Priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem". Annas had held the office of High Priest some time before, and he was, as we read in St. John, the father in law of Caiaphas; he had five sons, who were all made High Priests after his own deposition, and he is frequently called the High Priest, although not now in office. He had been deposed by the Romans, but still retained among the Jews the authority of High Priest; and thus we may regard all these persons as acting under the authority of one, and that one, decidedly opposed to the gospel of Christ. "*And placing them in the midst, they asked: By what power, or by what name have ye done this? Then Peter filled with the Holy Ghost*".—Now remember the promise—"For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

I have often said, in the course of referring to this in sermons, that there is not, in the whole of history, a grander

scene, than this which is now to come before us. The Apostles, who were weak men, ignorant men, men who just before this, but a few days ago, could not have stood up in the face of any one of these Rulers,—who fell away from their Master in the hour of danger,—the Apostles are summoned for the first time to give testimony to the truth of Christ. It is the Church of Christ on its trial before the world; and nobly does the spirit of our Saviour and our God enable her to come forth from that trial. *"In what name did ye do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost said unto them, Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel",* There is a solemnity in this beginning, in the address, chosen for the same reason as I just before mentioned, to identify them with God's people, "You ask us this—you have a right to do so—you are the rulers of the people of God"; for the words *"the people"* mean the chosen people, the Jews, the Nation which God had chosen. *"Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel. If we this day be examined of the good deed done by the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole".* Here then he had come at once to the point—he had given to them a direct assertion, and it was one exalting and glorifying that hated and despised name, which of all things they wanted to erase from the memory of mankind. It was He who had done this great thing: and the Apostle, who had fled away himself, and denied that Name a few days ago, is now not ashamed to stand up and say this in the power of the Holy Ghost. *"This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner".* These were words, the meaning of which they very well knew. They had heard them before: our Saviour himself had questioned them on this prophecy, and they doubtless remembered these words. They are now alleged once again to them. Now there is a

stone set at the head of the corner,—one of God's own choosing: He has placed it in his heavenly Temple, and this is the consequence. He then goes on in his fervour—*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*". Was there ever a testimony clearer, nobler, or bolder than this, a testimony given in more power, or in more simplicity? Well then Brethren, let it be an example to us; let us carry away this to day,—that we are every day put on our trial before the world; there is hardly an incident that happens to us, hardly a conversation that we carry on, in which, more or less, either gently, or adversely, we are not put on our trial, to testify to Christ before man. It would have been easy enough for the disciples, to shrink from such a testimony; but they did not, and it was the testimony of men who knew the truth of God, who stood on the truth of God, and who were ready to die for the truth of God; and therefore it is that this holds a place, of all the sayings of men recorded in history, among the very first, and the noblest. And if we endeavour to follow this example, we must follow it under these conditions, of earnestness, and simplicity. We cannot hope to make up a testimony like this: we cannot go out into the world and conform to it, then in the hour of difficulty speak of Christ in this way: we cannot go on doubting about Him, denying Him, and disobeying Him, and then, when the moment comes for the testimony, ring it out as clear and sharp as this one. Such sounds as those must come from the inward composition of the instrument, and not from the method of striking at the moment. If you want to testify to Christ like this, you must *live* to Christ, as these holy men did. You must be full of the Holy Spirit, or do not expect to testify like this. True, the circumstances are not the same; their inspiration was different, and the world was far different. The inspiration was higher than we can ever hope to attain, because there were different things to

be done, and different instruments to be employed; but the same Spirit is in us, and wherever we are called on to testify to Christ by word, or deed, or writing, the Spirit will be given to us, and, if we live by the Spirit in our lives, we shall be able to do as the apostles did on this occasion. And may we all of us resolve, that such shall be the nature of our testimony; no less clear, no less explicit, no less bold, no less free from all wordly calculations, —wherever and before whomsoever we may be called on to render it.

HOMILY X.

CHAPTER IV. 13 - 31.

We have here, brethren, the progress of the enmity and conflict against the Church of Christ, in its first advancing state. You remember, that St. Peter was speaking to the people in the temple after the healing of that lame man: and his speech was, as we found reason to suppose, interrupted by the coming upon them of the authorities of the Temple, and persons sent from the Scribes and Pharisees and Chief Priests, who put them into hold and afterwards brought them before the assembled Sanhedrim. Their answer before the Sanhedrim we have already spoken of, as one of the noblest and boldest confessions contained in the whole of the history even of the bold and noble confessions of the Church of Christ. We now take up the history after that confession.

The authorities present "*saw the boldness of Peter and John*". They knew that they were unlearned and laymen — "*ἄδωτοι*"—men not accustomed to, nor versed in, this kind of speaking. The line, remember, was then very strongly drawn between the teachers of the law and the people, the multitude, which "knew not the law", as you have them called in St. John. And the word here used is a word which signifies any kind of people who are strangers to any trade or profession; just what our word "laymen" means. We use the word "laymen" generally only as opposed to "clergy": but it is sometimes also used as opposed to those of the profession of the law; and it was once used

as opposed to those of any profession, who had been brought up in it. These men were not brought up to these things. "Whence know these men letters, never having learned?" How are they able to speak of what the prophets said, seeing that they were not educated to teach the things which were said by the prophets? That is the meaning of these words, "unlearned and ignorant men"; the authorities having apprehended that they were this, probably, by the way in which they spoke. They spoke in no technical language; they spoke the words of common sense and of common earnestness; the Spirit prompted them as the occasion required, and as His almighty power dwelt in them. They over-leaped, as men will do under such circumstances, all technicalities; they "taught as those having authority", as their divine Master did, "and not as the Scribes".

They apprehended, then, by this, "that they were unlearned and ignorant men". They wondered, and then, when they wondered, *they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus*". The thought, apparently, had not struck them before. They at first merely regarded them as some who took up the cause of Jesus of Nazareth, as many, I dare say, did at this time: but upon looking closely at them, they recognized them, that they had been with Jesus. Chrysostom remarks, (and it may be a good remark) that these, Peter and John, were the only two, who had accompanied our Lord into the hall of judgment, and had there stood during his trial. There is only *the* objection to *this* idea, that though John may very likely have stood close to the Lord, and have been recognized as having been with Him, yet we know very well that Peter was among the assembled servants in the outer room, and therefore perhaps hardly would be recognized as having been then present. At all events he was recognized, from some evidence or other.

You will perhaps remember to have heard a sermon upon this text from me on a former occasion; and I need

not dwell therefore upon that which is implied in this recognition, further than just to say that the having *been with Jesus* accounted for it all; and that we may well lay the same lesson to ourselves; that it is no wonder, that those who had been with Jesus, no wonder that those who had accompanied Him in the familiarity of a daily intercourse, though a reverential one, should speak other words than their own, and should teach things which they were never brought up or educated to say; for the Spirit of Jesus was in them; and this accounts for all strange things which may seem to proceed from "the mouths of babes and sucklings" when they become giants in grace.

The authorities then, accounted for all this, by the recognition that they had been with Jesus. "*And besides, seeing the man standing with them which had been healed, they had no thing to say against it*". The boldness of this man may be noticed, for having entered with the apostles into this hall of trial before the Sanhedrim; for he does not appear to have been taken and put in custody with them, but he had voluntarily come forward and had stood with them and kept hold of them. Chrysostom says, that there was a sort of providence in his being with them in that presence, for fear they should draw back; for if they did, he was there, in all his joy and in all his fulness of gladness at the reception of the strength which he had had from them, to convict them, and to supply the failure of their testimony. We may suppose this, if we please.

"*And having ordered them to depart out of the council, they consulted with one another, saying; What shall we do to these men?*" And here we may remark, and it has been indeed remarked again and again, on the relative situations of these men; the apostles full of gladness, full of love, full of boldness; the Sanhedrim deliberating, arranging, fearing the people; the one able to say, and to say with boldness and power, what they wished; the others not able to do what they wished. And here again our eloquent expositor whom

I so often quote, Chrysostom, comes in with a question and says, "Who were the slaves, and who were the free men in this company"? He tells us, that the apostles were the true philosophers, for they said. "We cannot but say what we have seen and heard"; but the others were striving to crush the truth. It is remarkable to find this said in the year 400 or thereabouts, when we know so well what fate the great discoveries in physical science met with from the authorities of the Church itself, after the year 1400, more than a thousand years after this event. However so it was. The one stood upon the everlasting basis of God's truth, the others upon the shrinking, timid, dishonest footing of those endeavouring, in order to prop up their own influence, to keep out the truth and to crush it down; as if, he says again, they could prevent by their machination the spread of the authority of Him, whom the tomb could not confine.

"For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is plain to all that are in Jerusalem", that inhabit Jerusalem, "and we cannot deny it". Well then, here was the fact; here was the basis upon which any man of honesty, any man who feared God and who looked for his salvation and was "waiting for the consolation of Israel", would have grounded his conduct. But now comes the miserable shrinking back from it. *"But in order that it spread no further among the people"*—that *what* spread no further? The knowledge of a notable fact; the foundation upon which this notable fact had been wrought. See the weakness of those who set themselves against the truth. And let us all learn from it, as we pass along, besides our general lesson from the whole passage by and by, that whoever lifts up his hand against God's truth, wherever it may be, whatever may be the consequence to himself or to others, apparently, of the spread of that truth, is in the same weak and contemptible position. *"That it spread no more among the people, let us threaten them with threatening, not to speak in this name to any man".*

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"And having called them, they gave them a general order not to speak nor to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answering said unto them, Whether it be just before God to listen to you rather than to God, judge". There is no stress upon the word "*ye*", in the English version, for it is not expressed in the original: "Be the judges; employ your judgment in settling this matter. God has spoken, and you have spoken. God has spoken in a way which you cannot deny; the evidence of it is before you. Now then—whether it is right in the sight of Him who had thus spoken, for us to be silent about that which He has said, that which He has commanded us to publish, be the judges: we leave it to you. *"For we cannot but speak that which we have seen and heard"*.

This was the first great occasion on which the church and the authorities of the Jews were set one against the other. In our portion last Sunday, we found the apostle speaking with the utmost reverence of the authorities before whom he was placed; — "*Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel*"; and so going on treating them as God's covenant people. The opposition then could hardly be said to have begun in the proper sense. Now, it *has* begun: now it has become a question and (it stands upon the edge and crisis of decision) whether the church is to bow to the opposing authority of God's chosen people, or whether she is to stand for God's truth, and to go her own way in her own work. And this, which we have been now reading, decided that point once and for ever. The church of God, in God's work, is not to be coerced by any human authority. Every member of the church of God is bound to submit to authority, wherever he is, in the common concerns of life. The church was not placed to rule the world, nor to administer the world; but the church was placed to give testimony to the truth; and if all the authorities upon earth combined together to coerce one feeble Christian to keep in one word of God's truth, then these apostles have settled the precedent for-

ever for the Church of Christ, that he is to speak, and not to be silent, in spite of all their prohibition. We are bound to believe, that when God's Spirit shewed his testimony in this form, he intended it for the practice of every one of us who have followed and who shall follow to the end of time. The Apostle, you see, did not set himself above these authorities; he spoke no disrespectful, no unseemly word to them; he rested his cause not upon any turbulence of spirit of his own, any revolutionary feeling or passion of his own, but simply upon the basis on which it actually did rest, that he was a witness for the truth. And so it has been ever since. So it was in the time of Luther. You remember his noble answer of the same kind;—"God help me, I cannot speak otherwise". And so it will be again, in any case where the truth of God, dwelling in the heart of a man by the power of the Spirit, is brought into conflict with this world's authority endeavoring to coerce it. The two have their proper and distinct places; let them keep those places. We shall never refuse obedience, as many of us as serve God, to any human lawfully ordained authority: but if we serve God, we shall refuse obedience whenever that authority stands in the way of God's truth, and wishes us to say that, for the Gospel, which is not the Gospel.

"But they, having additionally threatened them", threatened them again, "dismissed them, finding no way of punishing them on account of the people, because all were glorifying God for that which had just taken place". Here then you see how these authorities were themselves coerced by the people. They dared not to take these apostles and punish them. We shall find that the enmity went further afterwards, and God himself decided what now appeared to be trembling in the balance of decision, whether the Jews would receive, or would not receive the Gospel of Christ, as a people. At present, it seems as though the authorities were almost under the power of the people in this matter.

"For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing had been wrought". This is stated for two reasons. He was therefore all the better known to the whole multitude of the people, for he had been many years placed at the Beautiful gate of the Temple for alms, and they had all seen him there, and he was familiar to them; and also the miracle was a more notable one, because a healing wrought at that time of life, would be a healing requiring more power and more decisiveness.

"And being dismissed they went to their own"—to their own people—"and they related to them what things the chief priests and the elders had spoken to them". Now comes, then, a report from Peter and John, not merely to the apostles, but as we must understand, I think, to the whole assembled church, or at all events to a large portion of it assembled together. *"And they, when they heard that, lifted up their voice to God with one accord".* It may be perhaps a little difficult to realize what is here practically meant by this expression. Some have supposed that the whole multitude, each man, lifted up their voices and uttered the same words; in other words, that the whole of that which was uttered was miraculously inspired into each then present. Perhaps it may have been so; there is no reason in the narrative why it should not, and those who lean to thinking so, may well hold that opinion, for aught that is here said. Still I think it more probable, that the words were spoken by some one, and consented in by loud acclamation, or perhaps even by repetition after him, by the rest. This would appear to be the more ordinary course; and it does not seem as if there were any reason to suppose that God had immediately and supernaturally put these words into the mouth of the church; because they are the church's own effusion, the church's own confession—a song of praise (doubtless inspired by the Spirit) upon receiving the news which they did receive from the two apostles. Therefore I would rather say, that perhaps

one of the apostles, perhaps more, may have uttered the words, just as we now utter the words of confession, or other words, in our own service, and that the rest of the Church responded in this mode, and that thus they lifted up their voices with one accord to God.

And what they said is very remarkable on several grounds. "*Lord, thou art God, who hast made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them: who hast spoken by the mouth of our father David thy servant, saying, Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people imagine vain things?*" Now in this, first of all, they appeal to God, who made the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein. They recognize, in other words, the God of Creation as the God of Redemption. There is an identification at once of the Power whom Christians serve, with the Power that dictated the old testament Scriptures; and they put themselves therefore upon the true ground of Israel. Though opposed to Israel in this late incident, they are not opposed to Israel in truth; they are the Israel of God. There has been no break. The God of Creation, the God of David his servant, the God of the prophets, he is their God. That is their first step. And then they quote a remarkable prophecy, spoken by the mouth of David. "*Why did the nations rage?*" or, "*the Gentiles*". The same word, you know, is used for "nations" and "Gentiles", sometimes rendered one, sometimes another. In this very passage it is rendered both; for in the 27th verse, "*Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles,*" it is the same word as is here rendered nations. "*And the people.*" Here "*λαοι*" signifies beyond doubt the people of Israel, as I remember telling you, I think on the last occasion, that it always did signify; because by and by, when the identification comes, in the 27th verse, we have "*Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel*". So that the church understands this prophecy as relating not simply to the Gentiles raging and the people imagining a vain thing, those two being the same and merely parallel

with one another, but she understands the Gentiles to be on the one side, and the people of Israel on the other. Why, then, did the whole world, Gentile and Jew, oppose itself to God? *"The kings of the earth met together, and the rulers collected together, against the Lord and against his Anointed."* Thus they recognize the prophecy of God in the second Psalm as applying to this opposition to the infant church.

Then they proceed to identify and interpret it. *"For of a truth there have been collected together in this city"*—those words are omitted in the ordinary text, but apparently formed a portion of the original one—*"against thy holy servant Jesus whom thou hast anointed"*—you remember what was said about that word; it means, servant. It is here (remarkably enough that it should be) rendered differently in two verses so close together. It is the same word as *"thy servant David"* in the 25th verse: the one is *"παῖδός"* and the other *"παῖδᾱ"*. *"against thy holy servant Jesus whom thou hast anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate"*—you have there the Gentiles and the Jews, Herod being the authority of the Jews, Pontius Pilate of the Gentiles—*"with the Gentiles and the tribes"*, or peoples, *"of Israel, to do"*, what? *"To do as many things as thy hand and thy counsel pre-determined should take place"*. So now, you see, they refer to this same God of creation, the God of the prophets, who had before announced that this should be, all that has happened. They see in it the counsel of God; they trace his hand. And here, again, is a lesson to us who follow after. In every thing that happens to the church, and in everything that happens to ourselves, we may trace the same gracious Hand. Men think, in their own pride and their own self-will, that they are doing all these things. Herod and Pontius Pilate had not an idea that they were following out God's predeterminate counsel. Men set up and men put down, but it is God who rules: and whenever we are discouraged in anything relating to the church of God, as through the manifold divisions of our

times, as through anything that seems unpropitious and unpromising, let us flee to the same strong-hold, and say that it is all to do "whatever thy Hand and thy counsel pre-determined to be done."

"And as regards the present, Lord, look upon their threats; and give to thy servants that they may speak with all boldness thy word, while they are stretching forth thy hand for healing, and while signs and wonders are taking place in the name of thy holy servant Jesus". There is a little confusion in the form of this in our English version, because it seems, it being stated "that they may speak thy word with all boldness, by stretching forth thine hand to heal", as if the "stretching forth the hand to heal" were the speaking the word. But they are distinct and separate things:—"that they may speak thy word with all boldness, while they are stretching forth thy hand to heal and while signs and wonders are taking place in the name of thy holy child Jesus". They do not merely wish that all these signs and wonders and testimonies to them and to the truth of God may go on, but that during them all and by means of them all they may speak with boldness the word of God. Grant us not to shrink back: our part is taken; thy counsel has placed us where we are; give us boldness to speak, and may we go on, as this, by thy grace, has already been done.

Then comes the approbation of God, stamping their prayer with an answer which ought never to be forgotten in the Christian Church. What have they done in their prayer? They have made the God of Israel to be the God of Christians; they have identified throughout His proceedings in his church; they have spoken of His prophecy as that which should happen to her; and they have attributed to Him all the leading and guiding, whether prosperous or apparently unfortunate, which Christians and the church are brought through. Does He reject this appeal? Does He distinguish his dealings with Israel of old, from his

dealings with Christians under the dispensation of the Spirit? Listen to the reply. "*When they had prayed, the place in which they were collected together was shaken*". If we look at the Epistle to the Hebrews, in one remarkable place we shall find that when things "are shaken" it is a token that those things shall be "removed", "that the things which cannot be shaken may remain": and such an idea can hardly but enter into the mind on reading of such an event as this. The place where they were assembled was shaken. That was in the holy city: Jerusalem shall be removed, but God's truth shall never be removed. That was upon the earth: the earth shall pass away, but not one word of His shall pass away.

"*And they were all together filled with the Holy Ghost*"—with the Holy Spirit—"and they spoke the word of God with boldness". These words, the latter words, of course refer, not to what happened then at the moment, but to what went on happening after this momentary effect was over. They were filled more than ever with the Holy Spirit; they were all together filled with the Spirit; and all of them spoke the word of God with boldness. And here is a striking testimony likewise, and one which, if it had been our lot to go through the Acts of the Apostles, I should not have failed again and again to impress upon you; and that is, that the whole church of God, not simply those who were the appointed rulers and guiders and shepherds of that church, were filled with the Holy Spirit, and did speak the word of God beyond all doubt again and again. And this would have been done, not with any view of disturbing the order or the comely arrangement of the Christian Ministry, but in order to shew you that there is no distinct class of men, only such as are appointed according to the decent order of every Christian body, to speak the word of God and to administer the ordinances of religion, but that every Christian is made both a king and a priest in a spiritual sense, and where occasion suggests it, if necessity requires

it, if God's Spirit calls him to it,—or in the ordinary methods and course, where there is no such necessity,—has the power and the ability from above to speak God's word with boldness. We find the same going throughout the Acts of the apostles; we find it insisted upon by Saint Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, where he sets this matter in order.

And now, brethren, I think, we have gone through this day a very remarkable and critical portion of the history of the early church. We have seen the church stand in her true majesty; and her true majesty is, to testify to God's truth. We see her, every time that we read a portion of this book, rising up into clearer light, taking a higher position, speaking with a louder and a surer voice. And we shall continue to see it. The more she is tried, the more the power of God's Spirit dwelling in his people (for that is the article of a standing or falling church) is tried, the more it will be brought out, as silver tried in the fire. Let us, every one of us, in this respect of which we have been treating, be worthy members of that church, worthy witnesses to the truth, each in our own position aiming, not to raise that church in worldly points, nor to adorn her with the outward decorations of the things which men admire, but to exalt her above all in that which is her own proper office, namely to testify to God's truth,—and to decorate her with that inward beauty of holiness, which none can gainsay nor resist.

HOMILY XI.

CHAPTER IV. 32—37. V. 1—11.

The whole of this passage, which I have read to-day, regards the inner constitution of the Church itself. Last Sunday we were concerned with the conflict with those without; and the Church declared her position and standing, as in the midst of the world: she declared namely this, that no coercion of external power should ever compel her to keep back the truth of God: that was settled once for all. Again, we have a matter no less important, settled in our narrative to-day, respecting those who are to form part of God's Church, and the mind and spirit with which that Church of the believing is to be entered.

The Evangelist begins by a very beautiful description, partly repeated from the end of the second chapter, of the state of the Church at this time: and I suppose we may venture to say, that he inserts this description for this reason, to shew that no storm without disturbed the progress or the felicity of the Church within. Notwithstanding that the powers and authorities of Israel were now combined together against her, we find the Church just as she was before, when the Spirit had been outpoured upon her, and indeed advanced in that blessed state; for this description, though very much repeating the other, is a description of further progress in the same path. "*Of the multitude of those who believed there was one heart and one soul*"; they were all together earnest for one object.

You may notice, that such a description as this belongs to the infancy of the Church, no less than to its perfection. There is an innocence in childhood which is soon displaced, not only by the growing vices of the heart of man, but by the number of interests which distract it as men grow up to maturity. And even so has it been in Christ's Church. It was, humanly speaking, impossible that there should be but one heart and one soul of the Church in after ages: many things came to be discussed, and truth was searched after by men of different constitutions. And even had there broken out none of those fearful things which did break out, the heart and soul of believers would hardly have been one throughout the ages of the Church. But at present it was. There were no questions of doctrine; they were all settled upon the foundation, Jesus Christ the Son of God; and very likely the great multitude of believers cared not at present to enquire much further. Further enquiries were brought out, as Providence directed the course of events. Many of them were brought out during this book of the Acts, many after it, and in the course of the history of God's people. As yet, however, they had but one thing to think of, and that was the testimony to the Lord Jesus. Their heart and soul was one.

"And none of them said that anything of his goods was his own; but all things were common to them". I said something of this community of goods in speaking on the latter part of the second chapter. I will not go further into it now, than just to remind you, that we there found it to be a feature peculiar to the Church at Jerusalem; that it never was adopted in any other Church, even in apostolic times; that the reason of it seemed to be, a continuation, which was natural enough by association, of the state of things which was the case when our Lord was upon earth among that small body of Apostles, one keeping the common treasury of all, and all living together in community. We said also, that it was very soon found that it did not answer. We soon have traces that it was so;

that it was not kept up even at Jerusalem itself. And moreover we found reason to believe, that an additional cause of its being at all in active existence at Jerusalem was, the extreme poverty, and the state, continually degenerating at that time, of its population. However that may be, at this period it seems to have reached its height, as to the actual fact, and as to the presence of that state of mind and common love, which brought it about. That might be, and doubtless was, a state of things which could not last in this present world: but as long as it lasted, and while the love lasted with it, it was a very blessed state of things; not to be imitated by us, but rather to be wished for, and no doubt to be brought about in its perfection in that heavenly state where there will be no more of the perishable merchandise of this world, but all will be rich, out of the unfathomable riches of Christ.

"And with great power did the Apostles give forth their testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus". This was the very work, we found reason to say before, for which the Apostles were sent, to give testimony of the resurrection of the Lord. Afterwards their work passed more directly to the dispersion and the government of the spreading Church; but now it was that they were set before Israel to "speak of the things they had seen and heard": and they did it "with great power". That power was the power of the Holy Spirit. There is always a power, when a man who has seen and heard anything, in truthfulness and in honesty and in consistency gives forth his testimony. But theirs was infinitely more than that. Theirs was a power such as the Lord Jesus himself had promised them in his discourse, when He was bidding farewell to them, in St. John, which should recall all things that He had spoken, and if so, doubtless all things that He had done, according to their extremest minutiae, and should enable them to go over the past, even as we look upon a map, tracing out the way, without forgetting anything that had been done.

They gave forth this witness with great power. *"And great grace was upon them all"*; the grace of God, enabling them to do this, and giving them also that acceptance with the people, that earnestness in their own hearts, that power to withstand opposition, that courtesy to disarm it, which were so eminently manifested in the history of God's Church.

"For there was none among them"—that is, among all the Christians (it passes from all the Apostles to them)—*"that was needy: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, selling them, brought the prices of the things which were being sold, and laid them down by the feet of the Apostles: and distribution was made to every man according as each man had need"*. This merely enters into detail of the circumstance which is mentioned before, that they sold everything, and threw it into the common stock: The expression, "laid them down by the feet of the Apostles" may probably allude to the circumstance of the Apostles being seated, as was the custom with the judges in courts of justice, or with any that presided, on a seat somewhat elevated above the rest, to which seat those who brought the prices came and laid the money upon it—that is, by their feet.

We have next, one instance of a person who did this in the fulness of his heart, and in compliance with the sacred obligations of the office and position which he held: and then we have another instance of a very different kind. *"Joses, who was called Barnabas by the apostles, (which is, being interpreted, The son of exhortation)"*;—the word in Greek, *παρακλῆσις*, means both *exhortation* and *consolation*; but the word in the Hebrew from which *Barnabas* is derived seems to mean only the former of them, only *exhortation*; so that perhaps we are hardly justified in taking the latter meaning, which our translators have done;—it may be, that he possessed great power in exhortation, building up, persuading the people of God;—he, "being a Levite, and a Cyprian by birth, having land, sold it, brought the price, and laid it at the feet of the apostles".

Now you must remember that Barnabas, as a Levite, ought not to have possessed land. You will find a declaration to this effect in several places in the law; among others in the 18th chapter of the book of Numbers, the 20th and following verses. The tribe of Levi God chose to himself. "The Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation". Then the 24th verse is, "The tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance". So that it was an irregularity, which appears to have crept into the Jewish Church long before this time and was then unchecked, the Levites inheriting and possessing land at all. And that, perhaps, is a reason why this is here brought forward. Barnabas was a Levite; he came forward, he sacrificed his inheritance according to the law of God. So that in fact the Church was presenting more strictly a picture of what Israel ought to be, even according to the law, than Israel itself did. The Church was one in heart, and it was strict, and exact, and blameless, in following the commandments of the law. We know that this Barnabas became afterwards a very eminent man, "a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith", as he is described, and that he was for a long time the companion of the apostle St. Paul in his travels and missionary journeys. We shall have occasion hereafter to see more respecting him as the history goes onward.

This then is the example of singleness of heart, and devotion to God's service. Now we come to the other and opposite example, full however of important lessons for our own practice and recollection. "But a certain man, Ananias by

name, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and withdrew part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and having brought a certain portion placed it at the feet of the apostles". Now what was this that Ananias did? You may say, perhaps, he had a perfect right to do it; and doubtless so he had; and if it had been done in good faith and in common honesty, we are not certain but we may almost venture to say, that the apostles themselves would not have blamed what he did. Still, even if it had been done in honesty, there was not about it that full giving up of all, that throwing himself, as the rest did, into the cause of Christ, which those showed who brought in the whole of their property. At all events, it was a holding back. And I say this, first that we may trace in the mind of this man, what was the origin of such a thought as this. The origin of it doubtless was, that he was struck with Christianity; he was struck with its evidence; many very likely of his dear friends and acquaintance had joined it; he was willing to join it too; he wanted to live in the felicity of God's chosen; he wanted to have the credit, it may be, among his own friends and acquaintance, of being one of these believers, who seemed to be living so happily, and their cause to be so flourishing. But he had not thorough confidence in this new matter; he wanted to preserve for himself a stock, in case it should all come to nothing; to have something to fall back upon, as the saying is; and in doing this, which of itself, as I said, was no great matter to look upon with praise, the worst of all was, that he did it stealthily. He wanted to gain the credit of doing all, whereas he was doing but little. And both the occasion on which he did this, and the thought of those before whom he chose to do it, both shew to us a greater depth of evil in the man's heart, even than we have yet spoken of. If he knew or believed anything at all about Jesus as the Christ, he must have known that the apostles were set in a high place, filled with the Holy Spirit, and

that they were thoroughly well able to discern, and detect, and point out, and bring to shame, this evil conspiracy which he was plotting with his wife. If he did not believe this, he was not a believer in the true sense of the word. He dared to come forward in the midst of the assembled church (for so the expression implies, "laying it at the apostles' feet"; and so, I may notice, the interval of "three hours" in the 7th verse also seems to imply, that it was from one hour of prayer to another, which hours were observed strictly by the church at this time;) he dared to come forward in the assembled church in the presence of the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Ghost, and to put upon them this deceitful plot, imagining that he should carry his point with them and succeed.

Such, then, was the sin of Ananias. So that it was no less than a direct attack, by him of whom it is said that "he is a liar and the father of it", upon the truthfulness and the purity of God's believing servants. It was not a mere sin of one or of two persons professing to be believers, but it was, like that other opposition which we had last Sunday from without, an opposition from within of a most critical and serious kind. If Satan had carried his point on this occasion, it might have been well said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Where is the Spirit dwelling in the church? Where is the power that can detect evil and confute the sinner, and bring him to shame, if these persons are to be allowed, in the fresh morning and sunshine of the grace of God's Spirit, thus to bring a dark cloud into the church which shall blot all its sincerity and purity afterwards? Bear all these things in mind: for there have been those, in the treatment which the Holy Scriptures have received of late years, who have even ventured to arraign the apostles for harshness and cruelty in their dealing on this occasion.

He came in then; and he laid this portion, this stealthy portion, purporting to be the whole, at the feet of the apostles. *"And Peter said, Ananias, why did Satan fill thy heart, that*

thou shouldest lie to the Holy Spirit, and that thou shouldest withdraw some from the price of the land?" "Why did Satan fill thy heart?" It may be said, and it has been said, if Satan filled his heart, why was he to blame? But here is a question, "*Why did Satan fill thy heart?"* In other words, "*Why hast thou allowed him to do it?"* No man is ever drawn away after evil, without his own consent. Let that be well remembered, when any such thoughts rise in the mind. Satan plied thee, it may be, to the utmost; but he had no power over thee, he could not coerce thee into evil; it was thine own free consent, which enabled Satan to fill thy heart. And notice the expression also, "*to lie to the Holy Spirit*"; because by and by we shall have it occurring again, and a strong inference will lie from the conjunction of those two references. "*To lie to the Holy Spirit*"; because He was present among the apostles, He was present in the Church. "*And to withdraw from the price of the land? While it remained, did it not remain to THEE?"* was it not *to thee* that it remained—"was it not *thine own*"? No one asked thee, no one commanded thee, to sell thy land. There is no precept of our Lord, there was no command of us his apostles, "Sell all that thou hast, before thou canst believe". It might be under certain circumstances a duty to do so, under practical necessity; but it was not a condition of entering God's kingdom. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved", whether thou art rich or poor. So that, "*was it not thine own? And when it had been sold was it not in thine own power?"* Mightest thou not, as we observed just now, have brought a portion as an offering, and kept back what thou pleasedst? We are free in Christ; we are not slaves in matters of this kind. "*Why hast thou put this matter in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God*". Now let us ask ourselves what is the inevitable inference. St. Peter, having told him that he had lied to the Holy Spirit, says, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God". Is not then the Holy Spirit God? There is no force in language, unless He be. And consequently

these expressions put together have always been a strong hold of the doctrine of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. He was present; Ananias tried to deceive Him, and he is described as having "lied not unto men, but unto God".

"And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost." Now there is some doubt, and I think it is a legitimate doubt, whether this supernatural effect upon Ananias was actually contemplated by the Apostle, or not. Supernatural it was, beyond all doubt. It was God's doing. If ever there was a case where it might be said, in the truest and most solemn sense of the words, "Died by the visitation of God," this was the case. This was no mere natural result, no mere horror at detection. But it may be a fair question, whether it was the infliction of the Apostle determinedly and intentionally, or whether it was not, even to the Apostle, the unexpected infliction of God. I say, that that doubt fairly remains, as valid to clear the Apostle from anything like a harsh construction of what happened. I do not believe for an instant that such a harsh construction is possible, even if it were St. Peter's intention to inflict the act of death upon Ananias: but the narrative does not exactly state that; and therefore perhaps it is hardly fair for any adversary to charge him with it. We may very fairly, in arguing with an adversary, say, I believe that it is as you state; I believe that the Apostle did intend to inflict death upon him; but I say that you cannot fairly charge him with it on your ground, because it is not asserted in the narrative in the text.

"And there was great fear upon all those who heard it." I suppose the rumour of it, we must understand, spread about in the neighbourhood of the place where the Church was assembled: because this could hardly mean, upon those who were present and saw it; or else it would have been otherwise expressed.

"And the young men, rising up, laid him out", wound him round, *"and took him away and buried him".* It is the

custom, as you know, in the eastern countries, and was then, to bury during the same day; generally immediately after the act of death. These young man were probably merely the younger persons there present, who naturally would be looked to to perform any work requiring bodily labour. That there should have been at this time an order in the Church of the younger as distinct from the elders,—an order which indeed we never find with any certainty marked out,—is exceedingly improbable.

"And there was a space of about three hours", indicating most probably, as I just now hinted, the space between one time of prayer and another,—*"and his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in"*. And yet it had been bruited abroad in the neighbourhood, as we found reason to believe from the expression *"all that heard it"*. So that we must regard it as almost providential, that she did not know what had happened, in God's intention once for all to defeat such an attempt upon his Church. *"And Peter answered to her"*—we have often this expression *"answered"* used in the scripture, where there has nothing been said before; it may be, answered to her gesture, or her manner, or even answered to the very act of her sin, thus challenging as it were the same sin over again—*"Peter answered to her, Tell me, whether ye sold the land for so much"*. Chrysostom well remarks here, that he gave her a space of repentance. These words were uttered for the purpose of ascertaining whether she was willing, either having heard or not having heard of her husband's fate, to withdraw out of this evil plot of deceit. If she at this last hour had been willing to say, "No, we did not sell it for that; it was a base attempt to deceive, and I repent of it"; there can be no doubt that He, who will not cast out any that come to Him, would have received her as a penitent and taken her into his flock, and carried her in his arms as one of his own. But she had no such purpose. *"She said, Yea, for so much"*. She stood to the evil; she still remained in the

same mind that she had had at first. *"And Peter said to her, Why was it agreed by you to try the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God? Behold, the feet of those that buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out"*. There can be no doubt in this instance, though it is not fair to allege it as an evidence for the former one, that the same punishment *was intended* by the apostle, and was directly announced to her. This might be quite compatible,—though I do not, I should tell you, hold that view myself,—with his not having had it in his mind on the former occasion. He might see that it was the Lord's will, and the Spirit might have thus informed him that it was the Lord's will, to put out these wicked ones from the church by this severe punishment, and that the one would be treated as the other was treated. It is far more natural however to believe, that St. Peter was the conscious agent of the punishing Spirit of God throughout.

"And she fell down immediately at his feet"—just where she had come up, and where she had been asked the question—*"and gave up the ghost"*—breathed her last—*"and the young men, when they came in, found her dead, and having taken her out, buried her with her husband"*. There is no difficulty about the time which was taken by the young men. The place of burial was at some little distance. They had, when they came there, to prepare the grave, to lay the body in it, and to fill it up again, before they returned. The space of time therefore might well be that which is here described, and indeed naturally would be.

"And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon all those who heard these things." Now it may perhaps be in the memory of some of you, that one of my first sermons among you was on the text which occurs in this passage, *"Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God;"* and that I then went through the narrative, and endeavored to deduce from it the lessons which we ought all to carry away in our own position as members of Christ's Church. It will

not be amiss, in the time that remains to us, just to run over some of that ground again, to shew you what exactly it is, which you learn from this which we have read. We, I will say, profess to be God's people. The same sacrifices are not demanded of us which were expected by common consent of them. We possess our houses and lands. God has allotted to each one of us a place in life; and it is clearly his will, that we should not throw all things into common, but that we should each of us glorify him in that place, and according to the measure of the capacity where-with he has endowed us. And now then comes in the question, Where does the lesson exactly press, which we may derive from the history of these wretched people? Does it not press upon us here—that every one of us, who is given by God a position and an income out of which He demands from us sacrifices for his service, is more or less playing this deceitful part, who is bringing to him a mere paltry fragment of that which we ought to devote to his cause, and professing it to be all that is expected of us? May we not find Ananias and Sapphira in the Church now, when we look at those who spend a very large proportion of that which God gives them upon their own indulgence, their own display, their own feelings and their own desires, and a very small and petty portion upon God, and his work, and doing good in his Church? If there be a sin which resembles that for which they were so heavily punished, surely we must find it here. And are we, brethren, free from that sin? Are there not among us many—nay, may we not all in some measure lay this to heart when it is charged upon us—but are there not many, who in the broadest sense are thus endeavouring to evade their Christian obligations; who are coming and sitting in God's house as God's people, laying down as it were the price at the feet of God's servants and of God himself, and all the time are privy to a conspiracy among themselves to keep back that price due to God? And this is not only the case with regard to worldly substance—would that it

were! though that is an important part of a Christian's action; it is the case also with regard to exertion, with regard to anything actually done, any fruit brought forth, for God's cause and God's glory. Here are multitudes of persons professing to have the love of Christ in their hearts, and the Spirit of God the guide of their lives; and yet how much of those lives is really spent for God's work? Mind, I count among God's work, not only those outward things which are undertaken and done in helping the widow and fatherless and sick, and in taking the Gospel to those who know it not, those influences which every Christian ought to be exerting; but I would also count, and count first and foremost in that work, the duties of life performed as unto God, the great path and course of life fitted to God's glory. Now how many of these professing Christians there are (and I use not that word in its lower sense, but Christians, who would take it very hard, if they were not considered, as the term goes, vital Christians, converted Christians) who are yet living in their ordinary lives as if they knew not God, and bestowing not upon Him, but upon convenience, upon the opinion of men, upon anything that is conventionally expected of them, rather than upon the great cause of life, both of this life and the next, namely God's glory. I should say that all of us in this way either draw near to, or actually incur, the sin of these persons. Now there is an encouragement to it in our days which there was not, and certainly would not be after this terrible example, in the days of the apostles. We have none among us now that can detect these things. I cannot see, and none can see, how many of those now here answer to any part of this description which I have just been giving: and that encourages the hypocrites to persist in this double conduct. But surely there need never be any hope indulged, that this will always be so. There is One, whose eyes can detect, and whose eyes will detect, and whose voice will finally put to shame, all such withdrawal of part of the price as this. There

is a day coming, which will shew us all in our true colours; which will tell how much each one of us has laid out for God, whether it be of our substance, or of our exertions, or of our time. Let us look forward, brethren, to that day; and while we regard with horror the sin which was here attempted, and while we thank God that he has delivered his Church from it,—at all events, that he did deliver his early Church from it, and enable her to run her course free from its corruption during those most important times, let us strive to the utmost, by being watchful over our own conduct, by being truthful and genuine in our own conversation, by being thoroughly persuaded before we speak, and never speaking more than we are persuaded, by taking up no mere shield of correct doctrine which we do not believe, no mere outward appearance which men may look upon and be content,—to avoid this sin of untruthfulness and to give Satan no advantage over us or over the Church in the days in which we live. Depend upon it, that there is nothing so important to the Christian (and, as I have before said, and said again and again, if there is one point to which a Ministry ought to bear testimony it is this, and this chiefly) there is nothing so important to the Christian, whether he be high or low, whether he have grace to believe much or little, as **TRUTHFULNESS OF HEART, AND SINCERITY AND UPRIGHTNESS OF PURPOSE.** Let the eye be single, and light will be vouchsafed: let the eye be double, and whatever light there is, it will be turned into darkness. May God give us all grace to go forward singly in his service, so that, whether our place be appointed among those who glorify Him extensively, or among those who stand still and wait upon Him with patience and in suffering, we may still be true men, and not endeavouring to serve two masters, which no one can do.

HOMILY XII.

CHAPTER V. 11—42.

I will not read our whole portion this time before our exposition begins: it will all be brought before us in the course of the exposition; and it happens to be one of those considerable portions of narrative, which would occupy us more time perhaps than it would be well to bestow, in going over the whole text twice following.

We have in this introductory passage another notice of the flourishing state of the Church, very similar to that which occurred at the end of the 4th chapter. And there is a great analogy between the two, in this particular: *that* relates to us the flourishing state of the Church after the first peril from without; *this*, after the first peril from within. The first peril from without was, the rising up of the chief Priest and the authorities of the Jews against the Apostles, and the bringing them before the council, when they uttered that remarkable answer and told them that there was but one "name under heaven given whereby we must be saved": and then the Evangelist shewed us, by the way in which the church went on increasing both in outward extent and in inward faith and perseverance, that no shaking of the foundations of the truth had taken place by that outward danger. Now, there had arisen a peril from within: hypocrisy and double-dealing had come among the self-denials of those who gave up their possessions for the purposes of God's work; a terrible punishment had overtaken that first attempt at deceit; and now again he relates to us, that neither by that did the church suffer.

"Great fear came upon the church". It seems as if the church had hitherto not known her own holiness; as if there had been many (and perhaps this may have extended even to some among the highest of them) who were not yet thoroughly aware in what a presence they were standing; that God's Spirit was indeed filling his holy Temple, and that the earth was to keep silence before Him. So that, by this signal vengeance upon the first deceivers in the church of Christ, *"great fear came upon all the church"*: even Christians heard and trembled, and became fully aware what it was that they had undertaken; in what a light they were placing their lives and their thoughts, and that *"our God is"* indeed *"a consuming fire"*.

But the effect of this upon them was not to discourage them. The apostles grew in extent of power, and wrought more signs and wonders. They grew also in the reverence paid to them and their office by the rest of the believers and by all people around.

"They", that is the apostles, *"were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest"*, which I believe to mean the rest both of believers and of the people of the Jews, *"no man durst join himself to them"*. None dared take upon him their honour and their office. The nature of that honour and office, I have endeavoured more than once to explain to you; its peculiarity; its total cessation when the apostles themselves ceased; the impossibility of anything like succession to that office in the church of Christ. It was an office corresponding to, and filling up the place of that of our Lord himself just after the time of his withdrawal. It was those fading hues, so to speak, of the glorious sunset, which do not exist in the night of exiled absence when we are looking for the morning to come. *"Of the rest none dared join himself to them: but the people"*—that peculiar word again, *"ὁ λαός"*—the people of the Jews, the sacred people, God's chosen people—"magnified them"—joined in exalting and extolling them. We shall have a notable instance of it by and by.

"And there were the more added believers to the Lord, multitudes of men and women." It does not appear that this severe punishment within the church at all deterred those without from joining themselves to it. They saw, I suppose, that the Lord was really present in it; and all those who were looking for deliverance in Israel saw that there was a reality among this body of Christians, which attracted them, in the midst of their pains and of their dejections, their sorrows and their hopes, to the church; and *"there were added to the Lord multitudes of men and women."*

"So that"—that is to say, it went on to such an extent, that—*"even along the streets people brought out the sick and placed them upon couches and upon beds, that even the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them"*. These words may perhaps require a little explanation on two accounts. The adversaries of the sacred narrative point to them and they say, Here is superstition; we have detected an instance of superstition in what you call pure narrative of the scripture without superstition. That objection lies on the one side. Then the believer, who has formed his model perhaps upon too strict and too narrow a view of the merely spiritual doctrines of our own day, brings an objection on the other hand and says, surely this cannot be meant; surely it is too nearly bordering upon the superstitions, for us to think that the sacred narrative really intended that this shadow passing by did work these miracles; we must suppose only that *the people thought so*, that it was *their* mind. Now I believe the answer to both these objections to be exceedingly easy. In the first place, with regard to the unbeliever, we may well leave him without an extended or detailed answer. He believes in no miracles at all: he plainly tells us so. What matters it therefore to him, with what outward symbol the miracle was wrought; whether our Lord placed his hand upon the sick person, or placed upon the sick person anything that came of himself, or whether he spoke at the distance of miles from the sick person? What matter

these details at all, to those who reject the whole fabric of divine interference altogether? The answer to be given to the weak believers, will, as far as it is to be dealt with in the other case, deal with it. They say, Are we to believe from this narrative that even the shadow of Peter passing by did work these miracles? I say, Why not? Why may not it have been the will of the Holy Spirit, who in the instances to which I have alluded wrought the miracles by the divine power of Christ, or by that residing in his apostles owing to their union with Him and faith in Him, to work them by this instrumentality, as well as by another? We read further on in this same book, that even handkerchiefs or aprons were taken from the body of St. Paul, and did work miracles of healing. Why should not the shadow of St. Peter, who at this time was the apostle set forward to do God's work and to build up his church, have had the same power given to it?

But then it is said, Are you not encouraging all the mischievous and foolish stories with regard to relics now prevalent in the church of Rome? I say, Not one whit. The matters are just not connected in any way whatever. The Lord was pleased to work miracles in his church in the days of which we are reading; by what means, it matters not to us; by any means, in fact, in connection with, or which might appear to the recipient to be in connection with, his power residing in the persons whom He employed. He is *not* thus pleased to work miracles now. He is not thus pleased, because we do not see it. History does not give us, analogy does not give us (the analogy of faith) the same power residing in his church now, as we have all things testifying to its residing in the church then. And the matters again are totally different, because these things are not now employed for the purpose of spreading the true faith. Wherever the true faith of Christ is spread and is preached, justification by faith in Him, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, renewal and

righteousness of the individual believer independent of connection with any council or corporation of men, you will not find these miracles pretended. I only find them pretended to in cases where all these things are denied: and therefore I say that the two things are not connected; and that believing in the one, as we must of necessity from the narrative believe, does not in any way give sanction to the other.

You may say, perhaps, in connection with another point, Why is the name of *St. Peter* here put forward so prominently? I would answer (and those who have attended throughout to our exposition will have no difficulty in anticipating the answer) that throughout the earlier part of the Acts of the apostles, St. Peter is thus put forward; he is the prominent apostle. He is (and I believe those words fully, as I before told you, to apply to St. Peter, but in no sense to be connected with the pretensions which the Roman church has since put up) the rock upon which the church was first built; his name implied it; and the Lord was pleased to build upon him,—as one of the twelve foundation stones, the apostles of the Lamb,—a very considerable portion, indeed the most considerable, of the early infant church; first of all, the Jewish church, as we have it in these first chapters; then the Gentile church, as we have it in the 10th chapter and those immediately following. When his great work was done, for which he had appeared in prominence in public and before the other apostles; then he passed into his place as one of the Twelve; he preached the Gospel, and wrote the Gospel, as we have it in those epistles of his, as one of the apostles, and there was no claim of preeminence whatever: but it does seem, that he was at first put forward prominently for the purposes of God's providence.

Then we also read that *"there came in from the neighbouring cities to Jerusalem multitudes of persons bringing in sick, and those who were troubled by unclean spirits,"* and that *"they were all healed"*. We shall have one more such notice, in the 8th chapter, of the prosperity of the church in Judea

and Jerusalem, and then it has reached its climax and it declines: then, a full opportunity having been given to the people of the Jews to receive or reject the Gospel of Christ, an example having been set before them by the great spread of the church, by the flocking in of all those who were waiting for consolation among them, and they having deliberately set that by and put themselves into opposition to it, the gospel is thenceforth prepared for and sent out to the Gentiles.

Well, it was not to be expected that, after the former opposition, this greater spread of the Gospel, this greater vitality of the church, would pass without a renewal of it. *"But the high priest, and all those with him, having risen up, which is the sect of the Sadducees, were filled with envy, and laid their hands upon the apostles, and put them in the common prison"*. You may notice that there is a step in advance here from that which they did before. Before, they simply called them before the council and made them give an account of themselves. Before, they put them indeed into custody, to keep them so that during the night they should not escape their hands; but we do not read that they "put them in the common prison". So as opposition advances, severity advances,—and the sufferings of those, who are called upon to witness for Christ.

"But the angel of the Lord by night"—during that night—"opened the doors of the prison, and brought them forth and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life". Why this incident? The enemies of the gospel came forward here again, and they say to us, What necessity for this miraculous deliverance, when they were to be again taken hold of by the Sanhedrim the day after, and indeed punished with stripes? Why this deliverance, which seems to have come to nought, and to have been of no avail? I answer, it was most important. This was the first time the apostles of Christ were about to be delivered into the hands of the power which was opposed to them. It was important for their

own sakes, and important for the sake of the church, and important for God's truth, that it should be distinctly seen, that this was done by no accident, by no failure of divine protection; that it was done in consequence of God's appointment, and with God's own supervision: and this deliverance by the angel exactly and distinctly did the work of manifesting this forth. The apostles would at once see, when they were delivered to be scourged, as they by and by were, and when there was a plot against them to put them to death, as there presently was, for the name of Christ,—that they were not being deserted; that the same God, who had sent his angel and delivered them from prison, was keeping watch over them "as the apple of his eye", and would suffer no harm to happen to them. It also doubtless was not without its effect upon those who were outside the church, besides the comfort that it would give to the church itself. Though the Sanhedrim make no expression of their surprise at finding them teaching in the temple by and by, doubtless it must have been upon their minds; and when they deliberated, as they did, "whereunto this would grow", that miraculous deliverance must have formed a very considerable element in their doubt and their deliberation.

I must just notice, too, "*the words of this LIFE*". It was the sect of the Sadducees, who had risen up against them. We are told distinctly by Josephus that Annas, who was the head of the high-priestly family, was attached to the sect of the Sadducees. Of the family of his sons and sons-in-law, five served the office of high-priest,—after he himself was put out of it,—under his superintendence privately. It was natural, therefore, that they should be attached to the same sect. Now the sect of the Sadducees were just those who denied life after death; they held that there was no resurrection, no spirit, no angel. It may be said, and it has been said, But were not the *Pharisees* the great opponents of Jesus of Nazareth? Do we not find, all through his life and his ministry, that they were the keenest of his enemies, and that it was they who put forward every

step which led to his apprehension and his death? Doubtless we do. But let it not be lost sight of, that the situation of matters was considerably changed by Jesus himself being removed out of the way. The great reason of the Pharisees' enmity to our Lord was, his continual detection of them, and the burning words in which he denounced their hypocrisy, pretending as they did to a strict observance of the law, and being men corrupt in heart and in life. With his own removal out of the way, that cause of enmity ceased; and they were now called upon to deal with a set of men, professing indeed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but still hitherto strict and conscientious observers of the law, honourers of the temple, and of the temple service: and so we do not find, in the very early stages of the infant church, that there is that enmity on the part of the Pharisees, which we might expect. By and by, it all comes forth. By and by, when "blasphemous words", as they called them, were spoken by Stephen "against the holy place and against the law", then was the enmity of the Pharisees stirred up. At present, the great leading topic of the apostles preaching was, the RESURRECTION; and that stirred up the hate of the Sadducees. These Sadducees were, I suppose, men called by that name in those days, existing in our days without that name, who were men of the world, living in luxury and indulgence, for the most part rich and at ease, disbelieving in the truths of religion, unwilling to find themselves brought into collision with those severer and those purer commandments which condemned their lives, and with the fear of a future life, which they wished to put from them; and they would therefore attract to them most of the worldly and the secular minds, among whom certainly were the high-priestly family of these days, degenerate from God's fear, political merely, and worldly, in their thoughts and their interests. When therefore the angel designated the message which the apostles were to deliver as "the words of this LIFE",—a term which is never used of the common ordinary

life of men, but most usually, indeed I believe always, in the New Testament, of a higher a better und a more glorious life,—there was a distinct implication, that this resistance on the part of the Sadducees was not for one moment to be yielded to, but was to be met in its very centre and to be withstood.

“And they, when they heard that, entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought”. Notice still, in the whole of this first portion of the book, the Irsaelitish form of speaking; how careful the evangelist is to remind us on every occasion, at every turn, that he is dealing with Israel,—that Israel are having the gospel offered to them, to be accepted or rejected: I mean the repetition of such formulæ as this, *“the whole of the senate of the children of Israel”*. *“But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow”*. There could not be a better and more striking expression. They doubted what would become of all this,—what it was extending to: for not only were great signs and wonders wrought, and multitudes of people flocking to the church, but this supernatural deliverance had gone beyond all, and seemed to shew that it really was growing to a formidable matter. In other words, to any simple-minded and honest persons, fearing God, it was evidence practically of the truth of the whole. However, to *them*, it was growing of too formidable dimensions; it must be crushed. Such is ever the mind of the opponents of the truth: they regard not how true it is; they regard not what power is shewn of God in manifesting it; it is inconvenient, it is growing to

a dimension that can no longer be borne; it must be put down and crushed. So *they* thought of the preaching of the apostles; so the church of Rome thought of the reformation; so has ever been thought, by the opponents of the truth of God, of every fresh outbreak and revival of it. There is no real enquiry whether it is true, and of God; it is inconvenient, it breaks the peace, down with it.

Well, then, *"they doubted whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned"*. Here again recurs upon our mind Chrysostom's striking question, which I mentioned to you the Sunday before last. Who were the cowards; the apostles, who were being pursued from place to place to place, put into prison, apprehended, brought before the council; or those who were endeavoring to put down the truth? They "brought them without violence: for they *feared* the people, lest they should have been stoned". They were afraid of their own lives: they knew that they should have the popular voice against them; they knew, in fact, that they were in the wrong; and they were full of fear, while the apostles were full of boldness.

"And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" You may observe, that the high priest does not open the question again, but he takes it up, as does also the apostle by and by, from the point where it was left. We commanded you; you have been disobedient. *"Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us"*. You may notice, first, the same silence with regard to

the name and the character of Jesus of Nazareth as we observed before. There seems to be a dread and a horror, on the part of his enemies, even of pronouncing his name: it is always, "this person"—"this man": just the dread which we may well imagine that there is in the mind of the murderer in thinking upon the scene of the conflict, the blood-sprinkled hedge it may be, the pale face, and the conscious stars. They dare not look back upon the deed which they have done: guilt is in their minds, whilst worldliness and selfishness sits in their hearts. "*Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us*". We must take care, I think, not to give too solemn a meaning to these words. We can hardly suppose, that such worldly and unbelieving persons would actually mean, bring vengeance upon us from God: what they mean is, "bring this man's blood upon us" from the people: because, you see, that they were just now afraid lest they should be stoned, if they seized the apostles with violence. You have excited all this popular feeling, all this indignation; (it is just the constant shift of the worldly man, the same carelessness of truth which I mentioned just now) you are going to provoke an outbreak, and this man's blood will be brought upon us". Still, though in matter of fact we may be cautioned not to give too solemn a meaning to the words, men often speak solemn words without knowing it, and this is a notable instance. For what had these same chief priests and Pharisees (for there were doubtless those amongst them too) cried out at the time when Pilate had "washed his hands" of "the blood of that just person"? "His blood", they said, "be on us, and on our children". And so the apostles' preaching, gracious as it was to Israel, was to bring the blood of this man upon them. They rejected it, and the blood came upon them, not savingly or cleansingly, not, as the blood came in the Passover, at the outer door, warding off the angel of vengeance, and as it comes upon the heart of every believing Christian; but it came provoking

that vengeance, and calling down upon them the most signal indignation and wrath of God, that has ever been known in the history of the world.

Then let us notice the answer of the apostles. "*Then Peter and the other apostles*"—they are all together now, not merely Peter and John: here is another growing indication of the magnitude of the opposition and conflict. We must not suppose that they all spoke on this occasion, any more than on that other at the end of the 4th chapter, when they were praying together; but that in all probability one spoke, Peter most likely, and the rest yielded general assent, either by murmuring acclamation to his words, or by the assent manifested in their countenance and their manner. "*Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*" They too take up the question just where it was left. "You gave us an injunction; God has given us an injunction; which of the two must we obey?" You may notice, that they do not now, any more than the High Priest does, open the question again. Before, on the other occasion, Peter and John said to them, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel", and so on, and made known to them "the truth as it was in Jesus": now they do that no longer: but merely reassert the facts. Whether we are to obey God or you, judge ye. "*We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him.*"

This plain declaration could not but bring matters to a crisis. You have seen the temper of the opponents of the gospel; you have seen that they cared not for the truth, that they were worldly-minded men, not believing, in nor regarding, the next life, which the apostles preached in the

resurrection from the dead. Now you find an appeal to facts which they reject, a determination to go forward with this testimony which they had thought they had prohibited and crushed. "*When they heard that, they were cut to the heart*"; they were cut asunder, the word is; their hearts were divided within them; "*and they were taking counsel to slay them*". It is best to keep the strict sense of the imperfect tense, because that which happened afterwards comes in forcibly to prevent the counsel which they were taking. "*They were taking counsel to slay them*"; to put them out of the way altogether; the last resource of those who will not acknowledge the truth.

"*Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space*"—that is, to cause them to withdraw from the room where they were assembled. Having done that, he gave his counsel, "*and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men*". Now there is some little difficulty which has been made as to the mind and exact position of Gamaliel. I may just mention to you, first, that Gamaliel was a very noted doctor of the law, and his name is to this day one of the most famous among the Jews themselves, he is one of the few to whom they accord a special title of honour, among the Rabbis of principal note among them. This Gamaliel was the tutor or preceptor of St. Paul: St. Paul was "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel", as he himself describes. And he, we know, was a bitter enemy of the gospel of Christ before his conversion. How then are we to reconcile it with the spirit of the history, that this Pharisee Gamaliel should thus stand up and should prohibit and delay the counsel of putting the apostles to death? Part of the answer to this question may be given by what I have already said, that at this particular time there was no hostility provoked on the part

of the Pharisees towards the gospel, any further than that which might have occurred from the remembrance of what Jesus himself had said of them. But rather we may suppose, that the godly men among the Pharisees (and there is no reason to suppose that either Gamaliel or Saul was an ungodly man) may well have been in an attitude of watchfulness, waiting to see whether this would prove to be the truth of God after all. There is nothing unnatural in that supposition. If we look at the mind of Gamaliel himself, we shall find that there was very little approaching to Christianity, or to a tendency towards it, in that which he said. The records of the early church, or perhaps rather I ought to say of the mediæval church, have made out that Gamaliel was a Christian and died a good Christian. Whether that was so or not we cannot say: but I see no tendency towards it in what he here said; it was merely the speech of a fair-dealing person, and of one who wished to wait and to see whether this were indeed of God or whether it would come to nothing. It is obvious that in such a mind there need not be any tendency to adopt the doctrines which are in question.

Gamaliel, then, exhorted them to wait: and his reasons for it are now given. "*For*", he says, "*before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought*". I should not be dealing faithfully with the narrative, if I did not tell you that a considerable chronological difficulty arises as to this mention by Gamaliel of Theudas; a difficulty which is by no means insuperable; indeed it is to be very easily overcome; but I wish to state it fairly. In the Jewish historian Josephus, we have an account of an uproar created by a Theudas, and put down just in the way here alluded to, in the reign of Claudius Caesar, about the year 44 of our era, and consequently at least twelve years after

this speech of Gamaliel. It is impossible, then, that Gamaliel should have alluded to that uproar mentioned by Josephus, if that was the correct date. There are two ways of getting out of this difficulty. One is that in the midst of the many tumults which were raised at this particular time, to which Josephus himself most abundantly testifies, there may have been another Theudas who occasioned another outbreak. That is one way, but it is not to my mind a very satisfactory one: it is well to avoid, if possible, reduplicating instances when there is a difficulty. There is another way which is far more satisfactory. It has not been doubted of late years that Josephus is an exceedingly inaccurate historian. If any of you wish to see instances of this brought forward, there is an article called "The Bible and Josephus" in the *Journal of Sacred Literature* for October 1850, where you will find abundance of instances produced in which Josephus has not only himself made mistakes as to the time of events, but from a wish to please the Romans for whom he was writing (he wrote as a Gentile, and gentilized, so to speak, the history of his own country) he has falsified the fact. Now are we for one moment to set the testimony of a work like that against the direct assertion of a book of Scripture? I say that the scriptural account is the right account; I believe every word of it; and the other account, especially when it is joined with the fact of him who gives it having been proved inaccurate on many points, must be taken with a qualification.

Having said so much, we will now proceed with our narrative. Gamaliel gives this instance, and he gives another. "*After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed*". Here we have the Jewish historian confirming every word which is uttered. He says that Cyrenius, who made, as you know, that taxing which is mentioned in the early part of the

Gospel by St. Luke, was opposed by this person, "Judas, a Gaulanite, of the city of Gamala", and that Judas was killed and his followers were dispersed. And the exact word here is very fitting; they were "dispersed"; because they were not abolished altogether, for they rose up again afterwards and gave much trouble.

Gamaliel mentions these two instances to shew that if this were a mere matter of human getting up, a work simply of men, for men's purposes, it would come to an end, and would soon perish from the face of the people altogether. *"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found also to fight against God"*, besides fighting against these men. *"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go"*. The scourging was the punishment for disobedience. They seem to have kept themselves, acting upon Gamaliel's advice, within the letter of their own law. The apostles had disobeyed the command of the elders: they had done it from high and conscientious motives; but still, technically speaking, they were liable to this punishment. They "scourged them, and commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go".

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name", in the original text—for the name of Christ, that is. *"And every day"*—"daily"—*"in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to speak that Jesus is the Christ"*. It has been asked, it may be asked perhaps again, Why should the apostles in just the fulness of their testimony for Christ, and at a time when it would seem that the more the power which was given to them, and the more the

glory to their message, and its effects, the better would their cause prosper, have been given over to a disgraceful and painful punishment? The answer is very clear. The answer is given in this 41st verse: *“They went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”*. This was the object in view in God’s Providence, in God’s dealing with them. This is the object in view, whenever He subjects any one of his people to disgrace or to suffering for the name of Christ. We know not how precious that name is till we have suffered for it. We know not how precious a reliance Christ is, till we have been called upon to abjure ourselves, and our own comfort, and our own ease, and the things and persons that we love, and rest simply upon him. This joy which they felt, “that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name”, was worth more to them than all the ease, and freedom from pain, and glorification of men, which they ever could have enjoyed, had they not thus suffered.

We have gone through this afternoon an exceedingly interesting portion of the history of the early church, and a very important one: each portion, indeed, has been most important. We have now seen the effect on the church of purity within, the effect on the church of that severe punishment of which we treated at our last exposition. We have seen that, being thus purified, the church was able with two fold force to withstand external opposition: for the name of Christ and the doctrine of Christ had become so dear to the apostles, that those who but a little time since were ready to flee from Him and desert Him at the very first rumour of danger, now “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”. And so is it: passing through the valley of misery, God’s people make it a well, and the pools are filled with water; they go from strength to strength in the Lord, though, it may be, from weakness to weakness in themselves; and before the God of justice

every one of them, from having loved, and dwelt, and hoped, and prayed, and suffered, in the Zion below, will appear in that Zion above, where all these bitternesses of this earth will find their final end in righteousness, and peace, and joy, for ever.

HOMILY XIII.

CHAPTER VI.

Let us endeavour to form for ourselves a definite idea of the state of the church at this time. Hitherto we have had the following phases of danger to it, and the following triumphs over that danger.

The first danger arose from without. The authorities of the Jews found fault with the Apostles because those of them who were then in office, belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, and the Apostles taught the resurrection from the dead through Jesus. That was the first danger which arose from without to the church. That danger was soon brought to an end: for the testimony of the Apostles was in accordance, as far as the main fact of it was concerned, with the belief of the greater part of the Jewish people, and the greater part of the authorities themselves. There was no danger to the church from that circumstance. The chief Priest, and those who belonged to his family and his sect, strove against them in vain. Multitudes of men were added to them; and the work went onward.

Then after that, another danger arose, of greater magnitude, from the same quarter. The Apostles were a second time laid hold of, in consequence of the great growth of the doctrine of the gospel: the same substance, or much the same in substance, being attracted ~~to the same~~. That danger also came to an end.

Then arose one from within. There were ~~some~~ ~~many~~ the believers, or professed believers, of an ~~easy~~ ~~and~~ wished to join together the ~~entire~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~work~~ ~~was~~

for the cause of Jesus, and a deceitful walk and conduct, reserving for themselves an escape, and a worldly standing, as well. That danger from within the church was at once put an end to, in that phase of it at least, by a direct interference of supernatural power. We read that all trembled: fear came upon the church: and from that time forward we find even a greater and a more signal progress take place with regard to the numbers of believers, and the authority of the Apostles.

Here then we take up the state of the church at this time. It was becoming very numerous. It was absorbing into itself by degrees whole multitudes of the Jewish people. It seemed as if that people were about to receive, for a Prince and a Saviour, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had set aside and rejected and crucified. Now then we come to the first internal division in the church. All divisions in the church are not mere accidents of human temper and of human feeling, but are the providences of God for the purposes of His truth. And we are apt far too much to forget this, in thinking of those divisions, and in striving to heal them. We do not strive to heal them aright, because we do not strive to learn from them.

The division of which we here read, arose out of a circumstance regarding the distribution of the daily alms which were contributed by the believers. And in order to set it clearly before you, we must say something respecting the two kinds of people who are mentioned in this first verse. The believers on Christ would partly consist of those who were called here "the Hebrews", who were pure Jews, Jews descended from Jews, having been resident in the land of promise, or at all events having always kept their purity of descent, and their use of the sacred tongue, and not mixed in any way with foreign nations, or speech, or habits. Those would form one considerable section of the church of Christ at this time; not perhaps the most considerable in point of numbers, although it might have been so in Jerusalem itself. The other portion were those

who are here called "the Grecians". And by these you are not, of course, to understand persons of Greek descent, or persons living in the country of Greece. The word is very frequently used in the New Testament as a general word, signifying all who are not Jews; it is used to signify Gentiles, and is very frequently translated "Gentiles". These persons, then, were Jews in belief, Jews in practice; many of them perhaps themselves proselytes or converts to the true religion; far more of them descended from families which had originally been proselytes from among Greeks or some other nation; but all of them mixed, in their descent and in their habits, with foreign nations, and using almost universally the Greek tongue, which was the general language of the whole of the civilized world at that time, in intercourse with one another, in commerce and in literature. These Grecian Jews, or Hellenistic Jews, as they are commonly called in the language of history, made use of the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. There was a considerable difference between them and the Hebrews, the pure Jews, in every respect. For the most part, they hardly held converse or communion with one another. Very often that refusal to associate was mitigated, but at the same time there was a definite separation: there was no kindly feeling between the two anywhere throughout the Jewish world; still less, we may suppose, would there be in Jerusalem itself: and even when the two came to be mingled together in the church of Christ, where Christian love ought to have absorbed all other feelings, we find that the one murmured against the other.

But you may perhaps say, Was not this distribution of the daily alms to the widows and the necessitous regulated by the Apostles, who were full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom? The answer to that is very simple. "The number of the disciples was multiplied." The number had grown beyond the personal care of the Apostles themselves, who were constrained by the very nature of the case to appoint persons to act as their deputies, which persons were not

equally filled with the Holy Spirit and with divine wisdom as they were themselves: and these persons had neglected the widows and the poor destitute relatives of these Grecian Jews, in maintaining and confining their care to those of pure Hebrew descent. Here was the first spirit of party, the first division, in the infant Church of Christ. And now we shall see what use God makes of it. It sprang out of the weakness of man: God makes the weakness of man to praise him. The Apostles found out the disadvantage: they were gifted with wisdom to see that a new state of things was required; that their own administration was not enough; and they were also gifted with wisdom to see, as we shall by and by in the narrative read, that the lack must be supplied not by them, but by the body of the Church itself. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them"; they held, as we should call it, a great public meeting of the whole believers present in Jerusalem; "and they said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." They found, just as many ministers of the Gospel find in the day in which we live, and most particularly in this great metropolis, and in large cities, where the numbers crowd upon them and overpass all their powers, that they were absolutely called away from divine things to things secular. They were obliged to be, as they call it, "serving tables." The expression itself is a little ambiguous. Whether it means serving money-tables, serving out doles of money in charity in that way, or whether it actually means preparing the public meals, the feasts of love, the *agapæ* of which we spoke some time since, at which these poor persons were to be served day by day; whether it means the one or the other, it was the same secular department of the minister's work. What the Apostles mean, and what every minister of Christ, who is so situated, would now mean likewise, and say to you, is, that it is a pity that those who have been specially prepared, whether it be by that preparation which the Apostles

had, far above and beyond any that we can have now, or by preparation now in education and setting apart, it is a pity that those who have been prepared for the ministry of saved things, for declaring and explaining the Word of God, should have to "leave the Word of God and serve tables"; it is unreasonable; there are others who can do it as well.

Then the Apostles proceed and say, "*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men*". Why that number should be chosen we cannot say. Various reasons have been assigned. Some have said that the number of believers, as we have as yet heard of them in the Acts, seems to have been seven thousand. That may or may not be. At all events it was the number that the Apostles were guided to believe would be sufficient for the work in hand. "*Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*" Well, now, here is one thing very remarkable. I thought that we were told that from the Apostles was to emanate all appointment of ministers, everything relating to the ruling and the ministry of the Church. But I find that in the very first exercise of their apostolic power with regard to any appointment, they especially and signally abdicate such appointment on their own parts, and they say to the multitude of the disciples, "Look ye out from among you" these seven men: they do not presume themselves to point them out. Here, then, is one very important point with regard to the great question, which I said would run through the whole of our commentary on the Acts, namely the question of apostolic power, and what is called apostolic succession, in the appointment of the ministry. You see that here the choosing of these men was referred by the Apostles to the whole church assembled, and not taken upon themselves. That, at all events, is a point to be remembered and noted down. And it was referred to the church under remarkable circumstances. The church had just proved its own weakness in this matter. It could not be content without mur-

muring. One might have thought that the Apostles might have said, "Men and brethren, as you cannot yourselves carry on this distribution of alms, and as there seems to be , murmuring engendered among you, we will look out certain persons whom we think fit for the business, and we will appoint them to conduct it on our behalf." But this you see is not said. "Wherefore, brethren"—as if it followed immediately from the difficulty—"look ye out" these persons." "*But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.*" That is the office for the highest of the Ministers of the Church: and I believe that the idea (though it may not be according to the opinion of many Christians) that the *ministers* of the church are of necessity the *governors* of the church, is a fallacy not founded in scripture. I think, if you examine all the book of the acts of the Apostles, you will find that the two are kept very distinct; that those who are highest in the ministry are those most given to prayer, and to serving the church in preaching, and in explaining the word of God and testifying to the truth of Christ; that it does not follow in any portion of the Epistles, that those who had the rule over them, and those whom they were told to obey, were of necessity the *ministers* of the Gospel among them. This is a point very little thought of in general; because it is most usually assumed as a self-evident axiom that the ministers of the church must govern the Church: and it is a point of great importance in these present days, when so much is being said in certain quarters of the church in our land of the desirableness or the non-desirableness of the church having a voice for herself in matters regarding her services and her arrangements.

The things, then, to which they would give themselves, let us note for a moment. "*To prayer*". They would pray for the church. Now I think we lose sight of this point. The minister indeed offers up the public prayers: but is it sufficiently thought of by ministers or by people that he is to

be the great pray-er for his people? Not that his prayers have more virtue in them than any other man's prayers; but that he is to give himself more to that employment; that it is his especially, being set apart for the purposes of sacred things, to pray to God for his people, to bear them all upon his petitions to a throne of grace. *"And to the ministry of the word"*. "The ministry" is a word which has almost lost its power among us, from being exclusively appropriated to the set of men who are called ministers: but of course it means, to the administration of, the serving of, the dealing out of, the word of God. This, too, is the office of the minister of Christ, to "divide rightly the word of truth". And here again, have we not lost sight in some measure of this office of the minister of Christ? Do we remember enough, in our censures and criticisms of preaching, which have been very common among us of late, that the main office of preaching is to lay forth the scripture? We are too much disposed, I think, to regard preaching as an essay, either elaborately written, or else spoken from the heart, upon some subject relating to the salvation of the soul or edification in grace: and that certainly is one description of the sermon, which the minister of Christ is to deliver to his people; but it is by no means the greatest or most prominent kind of discourse. The most prominent, as the most frequent, kind of discourse ought to be, exposition of the Holy Scripture; laying forth either word by word, and as a set subject to be dealt with, the text of scripture, or else whole passages of scripture in their connection and their progress whether of history or of argument. These two things are the great employments of the ministers of Christ: and the more a man becomes a chief minister of Christ in the church of God, the more he should be given to these two employments; the more he should be a man of prayer for his people, and the more he should minister to them the living word, giving to them that which may, by being engrafted into their souls,

bring forth in them the fruit of righteousness to the praise and glory of God.

This office then the Apostles reserved for themselves, and not that of appointing these persons, or of ministering in these things. "*And the saying pleased the whole multitude*". Here observe again; we are not told, the whole multitude obeyed what the Apostles said to them—not at all—but, "*the saying pleased the multitude*". It was a piece of advice from those who were set indeed in a high place then, because they were specially appointed to give testimony of the Resurrection; because they were to be the founders of the church of God: but still we do not read that the saying was at once acted upon, but that it pleased the multitude. They judged, by their power of judging, whether it was expedient, and they agreed that it was expedient; it pleased them; and so they proceeded to do it. This would be strange language in subsequent church history: it would be strange language to have councils of bishops, and those representing the great multitude of the laity, sending a proposition throughout Christendom, and then an answer to be given back saying, "It pleases us to do what you consider is expedient". In after times we read of councils decreeing this and that, and pronouncing anathemas upon those who disobeyed them; but by that time the whole government and ordinance of the church, with regard to the proper proportions of ministers and people, was forgotten and set aside. "*And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Simon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch*". We may notice one thing with regard to these seven persons, before we proceed to the narrative respecting that one who from this time becomes prominent in these chapters. Nothing is said of any of them in the subsequent history, except of Stephen and of Philip. The history of Stephen employs the two chapters, the 6th and the 7th. He, as you well know, was

the first martyr of the Christian church. In the 8th chapter we read of the work of God which was carried on by Philip: and he is afterwards mentioned towards the end of the Acts as "Philip the evangelist". That is all we know of any of these persons. There is a sect mentioned in the book of Revelation called "the Nicolaitanes", of whom our Lord says "whose doctrines and whose deeds I hate": but there is no evidence whatever that they had any connection with this Nicolas here spoken of. We should rather suppose from the circumstances, that he was a faithful servant of Christ, and not the founder of an heretical sect. We may notice with regard to the whole of them, that the names are all of them Greek names, not Hebrew ones. This does not, indeed, enable us to say with certainty that they all belonged to the number of the Grecian department of the church; because the names of two of the Apostles, Andrew and Philip, are likewise Greek names, and certainly they were not in any way of Grecian descent, or of that kind of Jew which is here called by that name. Still we do find that with regard to those two very Apostles there is a circumstance in the 12th chapter of St. John, which leads us to suppose that they had connections with the foreign professors of the true religion of the Jews. "Certain Greeks", we are there told, who of course were Jews, because they had "come up to worship at the feast" (I mean Jews by religion), applied to Philip and wanted to see Jesus; and Philip came and told Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip came and told Jesus. So that it appears that the two had, as their names would lead us indeed to suppose, some kind of connection, what we cannot say, with those who were without: and we may therefore fairly infer that the whole of these persons were chosen on account of their connections or their favour with that portion of the church which considered itself aggrieved.

There is no authority in scripture for calling these seven persons *deacons*; they are only supposed to have held that

office: but even the fathers themselves protest against this idea. Chrysostom says that there is nothing to shew that they were deacons. He says, "The office of deacons in the church is totally different from any to which they were appointed; and we must suppose that they were only appointed for the present necessity". So also say other of the fathers. I mention that, because it has become quite customary to call this the appointment of the order of deacons. The order of deacons in the modern or the mediæval church may have had much to do with the distribution of alms and matters of this kind: but still, as an order of the ministry, we do not find anything here in common. These men were appointed for the present necessity; and it seems as if, when the present necessity was over, their office ceased: because Philip, as I just now reminded you, is called "Philip the evangelist" in a subsequent part of the book of the Acts, and not Philip the deacon. Indeed, the word "deacon" does not occur in the book of the acts of the Apostles; it occurs subsequently in St. Paul's epistles to Timothy, and elsewhere.

Now having said thus much upon these words, we go on to say what was done after this—how they were appointed. "*Whom they set before the Apostles: and when they had prayed*";—that was just the office which they reserved to themselves; they prayed that God would be pleased to strengthen them with his might for the office to which they were appointed;—"they laid their hands on them". The laying on of hands had been, from the time when Moses was directed to lay hands upon Joshua, the regular recognized manner of appointing to an office in the church of God; and it was just adopted by the Christian church from having prevailed by God's own command in the Jewish. It is of course a significant appointment; an appointment signifying the delegation of authority to do that which the person appointing is empowered thus to appoint another to perform. Further than that we cannot say respecting it. It is accompanied always with prayer: and the laying on of

hands would probably be considered to denote that that which was applied for in the prayer was granted to the pray-er and conveyed to the person appointed. That would seem to be the explanation of the gesture in thus appointing, in the simplicity of the primitive church.

"And the word of God increased". These persons thus appointed did not, it appears, confine themselves only to the distribution of alms. One at least we know did not, of whom we are presently to read: and from what is said in this verse, we may well conclude that the others did not. *"The word of God increased"—spread—"and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith"*. Now *this* is an important verse, as marking which was the culminating point of the influence of the church with the Jewish nation. Up to this point, we have had it increasing; and it really now seems as if we might say, "Well then, this people, the ancient people of God, is won over to the faith of Jesus Christ. We have even the priests themselves coming in and being obedient to the faith. What a change from the time when they urged the people on to cry "Crucify him", when He was carried through that street in disgrace, bearing his cross,—to the time when multitudes of the people in Jerusalem acknowledged the word, and a great company of those priests themselves were obedient to the faith of that same despised Jesus!" But from this time all is changed. Now, another element of conflict springs up, a far more important element, which resulted in the spiritual victory indeed of the church, as in every conflict, but still externally in the defeat, the diminution that is to say, of the belief of Jesus in Jerusalem. The rejection of Him by the Jewish people, formally and nationally, the destruction of Jerusalem itself and of the temple of the Lord, the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the earth, and all those mighty consequences which have been following ever since then, and

which are still going on, are the result of this seed of enmity and conflict which now sprang up.

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people". This is the first we hear of one who was not an Apostle doing wonders and miracles; clearly shewing to us that even that was not meant to be confined to the apostolic body, but was resident in the whole body of believers by virtue of the Spirit dwelling in them; as it is said at the end of St. Mark's Gospel, "These signs shall follow them that believe".

"Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen". It is hardly worth while to spend much time simply upon the explanation of these names. We may just say in a few words that which I suppose any one will already know who is intelligent at all in his reading of scripture, that "Libertine" here has no such meaning as that which we commonly attach to it in ordinary parlance—no meaning regarding moral conduct in any way; but that it originally meant, and probably here means, the descendants of persons who had been slaves but who were set free. A man who having thus been a slave was set free, was called *libertus*, and his sons and descendants were called *libertini*, those descended from the *libertus* or the freed-man. Now we read in historians, partly in the Jewish historian Philo, and partly also in Tacitus, that a great number of the Jews were driven out of Rome as being seditious or as propagating strange religions, about A. D. 19. Some of these were descendants of Jewish slaves who had been taken prisoners in the east, and brought to Rome, and there settled, and granted their liberty and allowed to exercise their religion. And in all probability this "synagoge of the Libertines" belonged to persons of this kind, who, having been driven from Rome, took up their abode in the holy city.

The rest of the names will explain themselves: they are merely geographical appellations. "*And Cyrenians and Alexandrians*". Two fifths of the city of Alexandria were Jews, as planted by Alexander. "*And of them of Cilicia*". A very interesting circumstance rises to the mind upon this word "Cilicia"; because we know one who was of that synagogue, who resisted Stephen, and who brought Stephen to his death, namely Saul. And perhaps it may have been by his own special notice and direction that this specification was introduced here, "those of Cilicia", just to denote that some of his own countrymen were amongst them.

They "*arose*", then, "*disputing with Stephen*". "*And they could not resist the Spirit and the wisdom by which he spoke. Then they suborned men, who said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God'. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, who said, 'This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law; for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us'.*" Now here arises an interesting question for us. All this is entirely new matter of dispute: we have heard nothing of all this before. When the chief priest and those who were with him rose up against the Apostles and put them aside once and again, we do not hear anything of their being accused of despising Jewish customs, or of their speaking irreverently of the Temple, or anything of that sort. We are told, it is true, that "*false witnesses*" said these things against Stephen: but allowing that word its fullest meaning, we know that every falsehood is grounded upon some truth. There must have been something which Stephen said or did, which they, as false witnesses, misinterpreted in their evidence against him: just as the false witnesses of whom we read, who arose against our Lord, did actually

report words which He had used, but reported them in a wrong sense, and so brought false accusation against Him. We may fairly then ask (and the enquiry is a very interesting one), How sprang up this element of opposition against the church? May we not fairly fill up the gap in this way? Stephen preached to them, as the Apostles had preached to them, "repentance towards God and faith towards Our Lord Jesus Christ". They alleged against him their Jewish privileges. They said against him just what is so strikingly brought forward in the 7th chapter of Jeremiah, in a passage which it may be as well to read to you. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other Gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord. But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore

will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim."

Now suppose Stephen had preached to them in that style; suppose he had brought before them such language as that, out of their own prophets; suppose he had tried to convince them, as he himself in his remarkable speech afterwards asserted before the Sanhedrim, that God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands"; would it not have been a very sufficient ground for these false witnesses to have declared what they did declare; a sufficient ground, I mean, as far as their evidence would be concerned, as far as their probability of persuading men would be concerned; to say, that he had spoken blasphemous words against the temple? It was very easy for them to put in "*and against God*": that always is the compliment of all accusations of the kind: if against the temple, then against Him who dwelt in the temple. We need not assign any particular meaning to that part of their accusation. But there is another part to which we ought perhaps to assign a meaning. "*This man ceaseth not speaking words against this sacred place, and against the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us*". Now might not that also be fairly founded upon the contradiction, which he would be sure to bring against their assertion, that the law of Moses was unalterable, and sufficient for their salvation? So that we can very easily conceive a substratum for the whole of this accusation which was brought forward; upon which we shall have more to say when we enter upon the long and the difficult defence of Stephen, which occupies the next chapter.

There is one more verse which demands our notice; and that is one full of comfort to the Christian, as well as full of wonder: it is, "And all that sat in the council, looking

stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel". He had learned from that which had passed with regard to the Apostles, from the cheerfulness and the triumph with which they had given their testimony, from their joy when they went back to their company "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ", he had learned (and that lesson was deepened by the faith and the hope and the grace that was in him) to "account it all joy when he fell into" this persecution: and therefore, by the power of the Spirit dwelling in him supernaturally indeed, for so the verse seems to imply, but still by the power of the Spirit of God dwelling in him, he appeared to those who looked upon him, actuated as they were by hatred and jealousy and ignorance of God and of his word, as if he had been an angel. We have an exceedingly eloquent comment of Chrysostom upon this verse. "There is, my brethren", he says, "a power dwelling in the faces, even in the expressions, of those who are full of God's grace, which makes them lovely to look upon to those who sympathize with them, and fearful to look upon to those who hate them". And then he proceeds to say (and it is very likely that it should be so) that it may have been on this account that the question of the High Priest was so mildly put to him when the High Priest said to him "Are these things really so?" and that they listened as long as they did, though at last they forbore to listen, to his apology which he made to them.

At this point, then, (and it is a point I think exceedingly suitable to the solemn duty of the week upon which we have now entered*) we leave the first martyr of Christ; standing where his Master stood, and about to suffer that which his Master suffered; fearless as the Son of God was, not indeed with the same divine power existing in himself, but fearless he was by virtue of the same imparted power, and

* This Homily was delivered on Palm Sunday 1857.

because he was united to Christ through faith. And when we think of both these instances of Christian boldness, may we also think upon the time when we ourselves shall be called, not to stand perhaps before human foes and to testify to Christ's gospel, but in the hour of our weakness, and when everything else is giving way, we shall be called to bear testimony before the enemy of our souls that we "know whom we have believed", and that we have served Him these years, and will not desert Him then: bear testimony before Him that we see (and may we indeed see at that solemn moment) "the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God", ready to succour all them that trust in him.

HOMILY XIV.

CHAPTER VII.

I have not thought it necessary to interrupt our course of exposition on the Acts by taking an express subject for this great day,* for two reasons. The first is, because our time is now drawing very short; and I wish to make as much advance as we may be able to do in setting before you the history of the primitive church, that we may have as complete an idea as possible of its conflicts and its sufferings and its strength, for our guidance under circumstances not similar indeed, but having much in common. And another reason is this; that in treating of that church whose business it was to testify to the resurrection of Christ, we cannot be far distant from the subject which occupies our thoughts to-day.

We have for our contemplation this afternoon a chapter consisting of the defence of St. Stephen when he was brought before the council of Israel as having spoken "blasphemous words against the holy place", and against that nation which God had chosen to be his own. Now let me just put you in mind where we stand with regard to the history of Christ's church. The first conflict that arose, was with the Sadducees, the enemies of the resurrection. It had passed by. It had passed by owing to the intervention of a Pharisee who, from what motive it is somewhat uncertain, but at all events

* This Homily was delivered on Easter day 1857.

as a wise and moderate man, had besought the council to deliberate, and not act hastily, with regard to these men. That had passed by; and the church was pursuing unchecked its course of prosperity and of advance; it seemed as if the whole Jewish people were now at last about to receive the saviour whom they had rejected; when from another quarter, from a quarter from which opposition was inevitable sooner or later, there sprang up a far more serious conflict. That quarter was the Pharisees; those who were zealous for the peculiar Israelitish prejudices and confined views which prevailed among those who boasted themselves as great upholders of the Levitical law. It was brought about, if you remember, as we read in the chapter last Sunday, by the circumstance of a neglect having taken place in the church, of the poor, and the widows of that portion of the believers who were not pure Jews by descent, who were Grecian Jews, Hellenistic Jews as they are sometimes called; that is, of those who having been proselytes, either themselves or their fathers, used the Greek version of the scriptures, and were looked down upon by, and in some respects kept separate from the pure Hebrews of the Hebrews—Jews by descent. Here seemed then to be an element of dissension within the church itself. But within the church the wound was very soon healed. There were appointed a set of persons, seven persons, to look especially after this matter which had been neglected. From the names of those seven persons we gathered, last Sunday, that they were most probably themselves belonging to the body of Grecian Jews which had been thus neglected. One of them, the principal of them, Stephen, had shewn himself beforetime a man “of faith and of power” in the Spirit, and after that he had been specially set apart by the laying on of hands to the work of the ministry, he convinced the people mightily, and he caused a great opposition to be raised up against him among those synagogues of Jews partly belonging to his own descent, his own body of Grecians, and partly those who were pure Jews, and had therefore even a greater zeal for their

people and their temple. They dragged him before the council; and they said that he had spoken "blasphemous words against the holy place, and against Moses, and against God". And when he came before the council, you remember, he was gifted with supernatural calmness, such that it even shewed itself in the joy and brightness of his countenance. They "looked upon him, and they saw him having a face like the face of an angel". And to this we found that one of the fathers, with whom we agreed in the matter, traced the calmness of their demeanour towards him at first, and the question with which this chapter begins: "The high priest said, Are these things really so?" Is it true, that such a man as this whom we see before us, who looks upon us with such a calmness and such an angelic countenance, can really have been a blasphemer of Moses and of God?

Now it is not my purpose (indeed the time would not suffice us, nor would it be desirable in speaking on the Acts of the Apostles in general) to make a detailed and elaborate comment upon the whole of this long apologetic speech of Stephen's. But it is a very important speech; and I may be allowed just to analyse it, and to set before you (for it is a difficult speech also) the connection, and that which was in his purpose while he spoke it. Its tone is in the main, as will be supposed from the circumstances, apologetic; that is to say, defensive of himself. But that defence is carried on under the surface: there is no direct outward assertion of his own innocence; but he proves his own innocence in the matters of which he was accused, by detailing to them circumstances which shewed, he having stated them, that he was not a blasphemer, but a reverent person, one who knew well, and who appreciated well, and who could deduce well, results from the circumstances that had ennobled their nation, and that had accompanied them as the chosen of God throughout their history. That we may well set down as the principal object of his speech. But in looking upon it, we see several things evolved during its course. He had been

accused of two things. The Jews had made, in that accusation, two great mistakes. They had accused him of "blaspheming the holy place". Now in doing that, they were confining the presence of God, and the favour of God, and the worship of God, to one place; and they were in fact deserting their high standing as Jews, and putting themselves in the very place of the heathens, who had their god of this place and their god of that, the god of the mountains and the god of the valleys; and were thus degrading their place as God's spiritual people. Throughout the speech Stephen bears that in mind. He strives to shew them that he is a better Jew than they are. We had occasion a short time since, three Sunday afternoons since, to shew you that the church in fact at this time was a holy body of men, who were really and spiritually and completely following the will of God even according to the law. We saw how a Levite who possessed land, when he became a Christian, sold that land, divested himself of that to which he had no right, and set an example of bringing the price of it and putting it at the Apostles' feet. Stephen then follows an argument in agreement with that, and tries to shew them, and does shew them, that he was a better and more consistent Jew, than they were. He shews them that God did not confine his presence to places; that He did not tie himself to this or that land or city or position or territory at all. This is a thread that runs through his speech, and at last breaks out in positive words: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

Then again they committed another great mistake. In asserting themselves as God's holy people, in asserting the habits and processes which they maintained as unchangeable, and blaming Stephen for having declared that they should be changed, they forgot one circumstance, that ever since God had chosen them for a people, yea and even before that choice was actually begun in tribes and bodies and families as they now were, they had been a rebellious people; even the patriarchs of old; even Israel in Egypt; at

all times and under all circumstances they had been rebellious against God. This comes out again and again in the course of the speech: it is another thread of argument running through the defence or apology of Stephen.

We may notice another point in the speech, which it would not be fair indeed to conceal from you, any more than to conceal any of those other difficulties which have come before us again and again during our exposition. In his account of Jewish history, and some of the details of it, he does not follow our present account as we have it in our version of the Hebrew scriptures. Of this, as I shall presently show you, there can be no possible doubt. He follows the account in which he himself had been brought up; the account which we have in his speech agreeing in some of the particulars which he states with the Jewish historians, and with some insertions, in the Septuagint version of the scriptures, which do not exist in ours. And hence arise one or two disagreements in slight matters of fact from the account which we now have in our scripture. These I shall just touch upon as I pass by them.

He begins, then, from the very beginning. "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran". Notice this repression, "The God of glory". It was a Jewish expression; an idea well known to them; the God whose glorious presence you know; the God of the Shechinah, well known to you as appearing over the mercy-seat; that same God whom you call the God of Israel, but who is not the God of temples made with hands; "the God of glory". He magnifies God and his name in beginning his speech, to shew them the disproportion between that which they claimed and what God really was. And then he asserts that "the God of glory appeared to their father Abraham in Mesopotamia". Now there is no account of that in the scriptures at all. It was the Jewish tradition, though it is not asserted in Genesis. The Jewish writer

Philo tells us "Abraham is said to have made his first removal from the land of the Chaldees to Haran owing to a Divine appearance and command." We have no record of this in Genesis, but merely his removal afterwards. He appeared to him, then, in Mesopotamia; and he "said to him, Go out of thy country, and from thy kindred"; (this was a message which was given him afterwards when he was to remove to Canaan actually; "And come hither into a land which I shall shew thee". God, then, gave this first command to Abraham unconnected with (and notice this) any locality, any place of worship. He was just simply to exercise faith. So that Stephen begins his apology by saying that the faith of the original command of God had nothing to do with localization of God's worship in any way. He was to go forth, "not knowing whither he went", simply in dependance upon God. That was the original covenant of faith with Abraham.

"Then going out of the land of the Chaldeans he inhabited Haran: and thence, after his father was dead, God changed his habitation into this land where ye now dwell". Here is one of those points in which St. Stephen's account palpably and manifestly differs from the account in Genesis. You may see that it does so in a moment, by just a comparison of one or two places. The 11th chapter of Genesis, in the 26th verse, tells us that "Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran"; and in the 32nd verse, "The days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran". Now in the next chapter, the 12th chapter, and the 4th verse, we read, "Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran". So that if you add the seventy years at which Terah begat Abram, to the seventy and five which Abram's age was when he departed from Haran we have 145, whereas Terah lived 205 years, that is sixty years after Abram departed out of Haran; and in consequence he did not die before Abram departed from Haran. Here, then, is a difference which

there is no possibility of salving over; nor is it for the faithful Christian to attempt to do so. It is most natural (indeed it is a point of truth itself) that Stephen having been brought up as he had been in the very forms of the Jews,—which were precisely these, for there is exactly the same sentence occurring in the Jewish writer Philo, “When his father had died, he removed from Haran, and he came into Canaan”,—is it not natural that Stephen, having been brought up in those traditional views, should state them in his speech? The scripture is not committed to the statements of his speech: it merely reports them as they were spoken. He was speaking indeed in the fulness of the Spirit, as regards his testimony to God in the gospel: but that fulness of the Spirit did not make him a different man from that which he before was. He did not divest himself of his associations, nor of his education, or of any of those things on which he before had had peculiar views on points of this sort. Therefore, I say, it is a matter not in any way to cause our faith to stumble, to find disagreements of this description. Would that we were all of us more unfettered in our studies of the scriptures, and sufficiently grounded in God’s truth in our own spiritual life to find no stumbling blocks in mere trifles of this kind.

Well, the conclusion which Stephen is deriving from what he says remains the same. God translated him, “removed him to this land in which ye now dwell. And he gave him no inheritance in it, no, not enough to set the sole of his foot”. There was no connection between God’s promise and the holy place, in the days of the purity of the covenant of faith with Abraham. You accuse me of blaspheming that holy place; and I shew you that there was no connection with it in the greatest and the noblest promises that were ever made to you. “The Lord promised to give him this land for his habitation, and to his seed after him, when he had not a child”. It was simple and entire faith from first to last: there was neither place, nor was there the existence of a seed, which was promised to him.

"And God spake thus, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, and they should enslave it, and they should illtreat it four hundred years. And the nation which they shall serve I will judge, said God: and after that they shall come forth, and they shall serve me in this place". Now here again is a mingling together of two different parts of scripture. The former part of this was spoken to Abraham in the 15th chapter of Genesis, the 13th and following verses. I need not quote and read it again, but you will find it there as far as, "The nation which they shall serve I will judge, said God". The rest of it, "And after that they shall come forth, and they shall serve me in this place", was not spoken to Abraham, but to Moses, in the 3rd chapter of Exodus in the 12th verse, when he was on mount Horeb, and God gave him for a sign that after the people of Israel came out of Egypt they should serve God in that place. Stephen speaking continuously of the whole sayings and the whole purposes of God to Israel, joins the two together.

"And he gave to him the covenant of circumcision". Observe, he introduces this word, "covenant". This is a word with which we are very familiar in the writings of the Apostle Paul, who, be it remembered, was standing and listening at this moment, and upon whom this speech appears to have made an indelible impression, of which we have traces every here and there in his writings and in his speeches, of a most interesting kind. We know well the part that he took on this, for him indeed sad occasion; that he was the chief of the witnesses against Stephen, and held the clothes of those that stoned him, urging on in every way the persecution.

"And thus", namely under this covenant, under these conditions and circumstances, "he begat Isaac, and he circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs". As much as to say, "Now I trace down from the covenant, this covenant which was unconnected with the holy place or with any particular

localization of worship, but which simply rested upon faith, to the heads of your twelve tribes”.

He has now gone over, then, this first point. Now we find just the first faint traces creeping in of the second point which I mentioned, that they had been always a rebellious and an unworthy people. “And the patriarchs, envying Joseph, sold him into Egypt”. From the first even, when those twelve founders of your tribes, whom you look up to, and by whose names you are called, were standing before God in the strength of the covenant, they were not even then faithful men, but they rebelled against the favourite child of their father, and against their father himself in his old age: cruelty was in their habitations. They “sold him into Egypt: but God was with him”. Is there not also here a double hint given? Joseph was sold into Egypt. You have conspired against the prince of life; you are conspiring against me at this day. It does not always follow that those against whom you conspire, and whom you envy, are also the disfavoured of God. Though your fathers sold Joseph into Egypt, “God was with him”. “And he rescued him out of all his troubles, and he gave him grace and wisdom before Pharaoh the king of Egypt and all his house. And a famine came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great tribulation: and our fathers could not find food. And Jacob having heard that there was food in Egypt sent out our fathers first. And at the second time of his sending them Joseph was made known to his brethren, and the race of Joseph was made known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called for Jacob his father, and for all his relationship, consisting of seventy-five souls. And Jacob came down to Egypt, and died there, and our fathers”. Thus he has traced (and I suppose that was the reason of his introducing that piece of history) the greatness of Joseph, the exaltation of him whom his brethren wanted to set aside, to shew them, as I said just now, that God’s choice was not man’s choice; that they might reject, they might persecute, they might hold their councils, but God could defend and rescue, and would do so in his good time.

There is another point here of minute difference, which I just mention, because it is fair that all such things should be mentioned. "Seventy-five souls". The number which we have given in the 46th of Genesis, the 1st of Exodus, and the 10th of Deuteronomy, is seventy souls, and not seventy five. But in the Septuagint version, in every one of those places, it stands seventy-five, and not seventy which he quotes from, and takes it simply from that.

"And our fathers died there, and were removed to Sychem, and were placed in the tomb which Abraham bought for a piece of silver from the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem". Now here is certainly, and that not dependant upon any Rabbinical or Jewish views of the subject, an inaccuracy in Stephen's statement: for the burying-place was not at Sychem which Abraham bought, but at Hebron, and it was bought of Ephron the Hittite, as you will find in the 23rd of Genesis from the 7th to the 20th verses. It is not worth while for us now to read the account, but so it is: Abraham bought a field at Hebron of Ephron the Hittite: There is no mention at all made of its being for a burying-place. But it was Jacob who bought a field near Shechem "of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father". These two incidents, then, in this case are confused together. And again I say, if it is necessary to say it again, that there is no reason at all for us to be ashamed of such a statement--no reason for us to be afraid of it, or in any way staggered at it. It was not Stephen's purpose to give an accurate history of the children of Israel, but to derive results from that history, which remain irrefragable, whatever the details which he alleged. And those results he goes on with. He spoke those in the power of Gods Spirit; and that power was given such as his adversaries, as we see by and by, could not withstand, notwithstanding that he himself in some minute particulars at the time stated that which he had believed to be the case from memory, and perhaps carelessly and inaccurately.

“And when the time drew near of the promise which God promised to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until another king arose, who knew not Joseph. This man dealt falsely with our race, and injured our fathers, and made them expose their children so that they could not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding beautiful—literally, “was beautiful even in the sight of God”—it is a method of expression—“was exceeding beautiful”, and was brought up three months in the house of his father: and when he had been exposed, the daughter of Pharaoh took him up and brought him up as her son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians”. This, again, was a matter very likely accurate, but not contained in scripture: it was contained in the traditions of the Rabbis. They tell us at very considerable length all the subjects in which Moses was instructed in Egypt. It may be perfectly true for all that. “And he was powerful in words and in deeds. And when forty years were fulfilled to him, it came into his heart”—this again is a particular, that his age was forty years, which is not mentioned in scripture itself, but which was possibly in the account which the Jews had—“it came into his mind to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And having seen one of them wronged, he defended him; and he avenged the person who was wronged, having struck the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren would understand how that God through his hand would give them salvation: but they understood it not”. Here again he returns to his point. Here was Moses, actually that Moses in whom you hope, that Moses against whom you accuse me of having spoken blasphemous words, not received by his own people: they rejected him when he came before them as a judge and a deliverer, and they would not have him. God had it in his mind to bring salvation to his people by Moses; but they understood it not, and they thrust him away. “On the following day he came before them as they were contending, and he was endeavouring to

set them at one with one another, saying, *Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one another? And he that wronged his neighbour thrust him away, saying, who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Art thou willing to kill me, in the way in which thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?*" Here then Moses himself was rejected by Israel; and so it was no wonder that the Lord of life, and that very Stephen his servant and his minister, were rejected also.

"And Moses fled at that saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were fulfilled there"—these two forty years together make up the fourscore years which Moses was old at the time he led Israel out of Egypt, which we know from the book of Exodus—"the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the desert of mount Sina in a flame of fire in a bush. And Moses, when he saw it, wondered at the sight: and when he approached to look at it, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, *"I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses trembled and dared not to behold. And the Lord said to him, Take off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place upon which thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the suffering of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and I am come down to free them. And now come, let me send thee to Egypt."* This Moses, whom they denied, saying, who made thee a ruler and a judge? this same did God send as a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush". Now you see he here draws the lesson for them. You rejected Moses; God established him to be your deliverer: he means it thence to be inferred, that although you have rejected the Lord Jesus also, God has established him to be your deliverer. You reject me who preach him to you; God will deliver me from your hand. It does not follow that he whom you reject is also rejected of God.

"This man brought them out, working signs and wonders

in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This Moses is he who said to the children of Israel—"not only did God establish him to be a prophet, but God by him prophesied of this very Jesus of Nazareth whom you are now rejecting and are about to put me to death for preaching to you: this very person is he by whom God said,—“The Lord your God shall raise up a prophet to you of your brethren like unto me; him shall ye hear”. Of this prophecy we have several times already spoken. It was one, as might well be expected, of the favourite and foremost prophecies which were adduced by the Apostles to the children of Israel, because it was one uttered by their law-giver Moses, in whom they specially hoped, and upon whose exclusive commands to them they were standing as in opposition to this very prophet of whom Moses had spoken.

“This is he who was in the church in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received living oracles to give to us: whom our fathers would not obey, but they thrust him from them, and they turned in their heart back again to Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and they brought sacrifice to the idol, and they rejoiced in the works of their own hands”. Notice how he waxes onward, more fervent as his speech goes forward; how the subject of the rebellion of Israel, the subject of Israel having rejected God, and having been always, as he by and by says, hard-hearted and stiff-necked, rises before him in its magnitude, till at last towards the end of his speech he breaks forth in fervour and in rebuke against them, and their rage will no longer know bounds, and they seize upon him, and carry him away to be stoned.

“And God turned, and gave them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, namely in the book of Amos in the 5th chapter and the

25th verse, "Have ye brought to me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan"—the word is another word in the book of Amos; the prophecy stands in this way: "Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your God, which ye made to yourselves." It is quite uncertain, and I believe no scholars have been able to determine, what either the word "Chiun" or "Remphan" means. They were both of them probably the name of some idol which the children of Israel had adopted from the idolatrous nations around them. "Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your God Remphan, figures which ye made to serve them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon". The prophecy of Amos says, "beyond Damascus". It is exceedingly probable that Stephen, speaking after the event, should have substituted Babylon, which was really the place of the captivity, instead of Damascus, which was named before-hand.

"The tabernacle of witness was with our fathers in the wilderness, as He commanded who spoke to Moses that he should make it according to the type which he had seen. Which tabernacle also our fathers received, and brought in with Joshua, in their taking possession of the nations which God drove out from before the face of our fathers, until the days of David; who found grace before God, and asked to be allowed to build a tabernacle to the God of Jacob". Now in this part of his speech he is tracing downwards the view which formed their cause of accusation. You have spoken, he said, of the holy place: God at first had no holy place in which he was said to dwell more than any other: it was a covenant of faith. But when they became rebellious God's ordinances became more definite: He enclosed that covenant of faith, so to speak, with a hedge; and it was, a covenant of insufficient works: He gave them laws which were not

good, statutes by which they could not live: and then his worship was localized; He then had a tabernacle, which went about in the wilderness with our fathers, which came into Canaan with Joshua; and David desired to build up that tabernacle more substantially. He indeed did not obtain permission to do it. "But Solomon built him a house". This place, which you speak of, was first built by Solomon: he was the first who devised the idea of giving to the God of Israel a settled place and habitation, which you call the holy place: but it was not so from of old. "Solomon built him a house. But the Highest dwelleth not in temples made with hands". How interesting it is to remember, that when St. Paul, the persecutor of Stephen stood, before that assembly at Athens, the representative of the intellectual world of Greece, as this assembly was of the world of Israel, God's people, one of the things which he said, having before his eyes then the goodly temples which they had built to their deities, was this very saying, "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands". Can we forbear to have it suggested to our minds that at that moment he had before him a scene when not he, but Stephen, stood before a council, when he himself was the persecutor, and when these words, which he derided at the time, sank so deeply into his memory? "The Highest dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as the prophet saith, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is the footstool of my feet: what house will ye build for me? saith the Lord: and what shall be the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?" The 60th chapter of Isaiah, the first verse, these words are quoted from.

And now, you see, he goes to the very central point of his controversy with them. They had accused him because he had spoken this very truth in his preaching to them; because he had said that they who were worshippers of God should "worship him in spirit and truth". This was the reason why they

had accused him of blaspheming the holy place. Now he gets to that very assertion; and at this point, whether from some gesture or manner of the council who heard him, or perhaps, which is more likely, from the growing fervor of his own spirit, carried forward by the Spirit of God, in his defence, he breaks out, not carrying on the history any further, in this way: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always grieve the Spirit of God: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they have killed those who preached before to them of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye now have been the betrayers and murderers: who received the law by the ministration of angels, and did not keep it". This point, of the law being given by the ministration of angels, you will remember is again asserted by St. Paul in the epistle to the Galatians, that the law was given "by angels in the hand of a mediator".

This language of Stephen's indignation, so pointed, so just, cutting so deep into the consciences of those who heard him, would not pass unnoticed, and indeed begat in them a similar state of fervor and of indignation on their side. When they heard these things", literally, "they gnashed their teeth in their hearts"; that is to say, both by outward and by inward gesture they shewed their indignation. Their hearts were stirred up to burst forth upon him who was excusing himself before them; and they by outward token and outward process manifested this feeling, "and they gnashed their teeth upon him".

"And being full of the Holy Spirit, having fixed his eyes upon the heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God". Now this is well worthy of our notice. This is the first time that the ascended Saviour had appeared to human eyes. The next time that he appeared was to that very young man who was foremost among the

persecutors of Stephen. So universal is the grace of Christ, at one time manifesting itself to the martyr in his death agonies, at another time to the persecutor on his way to harass and ravage the church: both times to direct and to console. He saw the heavens opened, and he said, "I see the Son of man standing on the right hand of God". Now this is the only time, except by our Lord's own lips, when he is called "the Son of man". We read in the prophets, "one like unto the Son of man", and expressions which come near to the denomination of him by this name, But we may venture to ask, as we always ought to do whenever any unusual expression is before us in scripture, why this may have been used by Stephen; rather, why the Holy Spirit directed him to use this word; for he was full of the Holy Spirit when he looked up and spoke it. If we turn a little way back in the gospel history, I think we shall have no difficulty in answering this question. When our Lord himself was before that same council, they asked Him, in that mock trial which he underwent at their hands, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Our Lord said, "I am: and hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power". Why, they are the very words. And what this must have carried to the hearts of those who were present! "I see that which you were told you should see: I see by anticipation, for my defence, for my establishment and confirmation in my trial, that which you will see to your dismay, and will call upon the rocks to fall upon you and to the hills to cover you!" Here then is the reason of this expression: it was to put them in mind of the day when the Lord himself had used it—of the day when they themselves should see him hereafter.

"Crying out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears, and they rushed with one accord upon him, and having cast him out of the city, they stoned him; and the witnesses cast down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul". We know that the Jews had not the power of life and death

at this time: the adversaries of the faith have said, how then could they have stoned Stephen? Forgetting, that the whole matter was evidently a tumultuary proceeding. They probably would, if they had gone quietly on with it, have adjudged him worthy of death, and have put him in prison till some feast, when the Roman governor would have come, as he did occasionally visit Jerusalem at feast time, from Cæsarea, and then they would have delivered him over to his power, and he would have been put to death, as our Lord was, by Roman authority. But the whole of this was an outbreak, and such an outbreak as was very common in Jerusalem. The Jews were a people given most especially to rebellion and riot upon their passions being excited: their own historian is full of accounts of it: and it was in consequence of the repeated outbreaks of this sort, outbreaks causing great sacrifice of life in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, that at last the Roman power was brought upon them, and the vengeance which destroyed Jerusalem came upon them at length. It was a tumultuary proceeding then, out of course of law, and not to be brought into question as anything which they could or could not legally do at the time.

“And they stoned Stephen, calling out in prayer, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”. If there were any doubt before as to prayer to the Lord Jesus directly, if there were even a doubt as to that prayer in the first chapter when “they prayed and said, Lord, thou who knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen”, after Jesus had said, “Have I not chosen you twelve?”—if there could be any doubt about that, there is none here. “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”. The Lord himself had said in his dying moment, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit”. No man could without blasphemy deliver his spirit into the hands of a fellow mortal. No man, thinking on his death-bed of a dear friend whom he had lost, would say, Into thy hands I commend my spirit: the very idea is revolting to us. I know not that even the absurd

adoration of the saints who have passed from us has ever reached such a point as this. He of whom it could be thus said, Into thy hands I commend my spirit, must have been God and none other. Here then we have, in the most solemn moment of the agony of the first martyr, a direct address to the Saviour, and the commendation to Him, as I hope and trust we may have strength and faith every one of us to commend ourselves into the hands of Jesus, our Lord and our God.

"And having kneeled down, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, weigh not this sin into their scale"—"lay not this sin to their charge". That is the literal meaning of the words—put it not into the scale against them. Herein, also, he imitated, and beautifully imitated, his dying Lord: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". But it was even more particular than that. *Those* words were spoken, you may remember, in the propriety of the time, and the incident which was then happening, of the Roman soldiers who were nailing our Lord to the cross. *These* words were spoken of the people of God themselves, who *did* know what they were doing; whose consciences were convicted by the word of life, and who were going directly against that conviction. So that there is even something more striking in this prayer of the first martyr, owing I mean to the general nature of it, and to its applying to the whole matter of his martyrdom, than in that one of our blessed Lord, which was particularly with regard to the poor heathens who did not know what they were at that moment doing. It breathed the spirit of Christ fully and entirely. He, when he was being crucified, assured the penitent thief that he should be with Him in paradise: and the whole act of His death was a prayer of this kind; the whole import of Christ's death was, Lay not this sin to their charge: it was humanity which was putting him to death, all our race and the sins of it; and that death has wiped out the sin of the world.

"And when he had said this, he fell asleep". How beauti-

fully and gently the death of the first martyr is here introduced! "He fell asleep". In the midst of that fearful storm which was rained upon him, that death-storm which was even beating out his life, "he fell asleep". And so will it be with every servant of Jesus, not only with those who have undergone martyrdom for his sake. There are martyrdoms which come not from without; the martyrdoms of long severe anguish and pain and weakness, of which none know but the sufferer himself; just as hard to bear as this, although this carries with it more outward semblance; just as difficult to bear as any of those sufferings which have been inflicted in persecution upon God's servants.

Brethren, whatever we are called to bear, may we bear it thus: may we keep in mind the calmness and faith and joy of this servant of the Lord, who was called upon to head "the noble army of martyrs" for his sake. And if we live in days when there is no persecution, in days when we have to defend ourselves not against carnal but against spiritual enemies, may we none the more for this cast away our firmness, or our confidence, or our power, amidst weakness, and amidst errors, and amidst infirmities and sins, of giving testimony to that Gospel of Christ which is bound to no time nor place, which is a spiritual Gospel, dependant upon the serving of Him who is Himself spirit, and whom we must serve "in spirit and truth". May we be so built up into that truth, that all enmity may fall helpless upon us, and that we may be enabled in our last hour to see by faith the Lord Jesus, standing for our defence and receiving our spirits, and fall asleep in Him, even as this his servant did of old.

HOMILY XV.

CHAPTER VIII. 1 — 13.

We have arrived at a remarkable epoch in the history of the apostolic church. We have passed through, so to speak, its first phase. We have passed through that state of things when the whole church, at all events the whole head quarters of the church, being fixed at Jerusalem, its efforts were directed entirely there to the conversion of the Jews, to their reception of the Gospel of Christ. It pleased God not only that the Jews should have the priority in the offer of the gospel everywhere, but that the Jewish people as a nation should have that priority for some certain time, and that the gospel should be fixed and centralized at Jerusalem, and that there its first efforts should be bestowed. And for a time, as we remember, those efforts went on most prosperously. Opposition sprang up here and there, but seemed to be very soon borne down again. First the Sadducees complained that the Resurrection was taught; but then they were set aside by the wisdom and the calm advice of a Pharisee. One and another sprang up objecting, and the Apostles were in danger more than once; but still all seemed to go on, as regarded the whole message of the church, prosperously; until at last, owing to a need springing up within the church itself of ministrations to be carried on by those who were not purely and entirely Jews, the hostile element of Phariseeism was awakened against the progress

of the Gospel. This was indeed its most deadly and its most dangerous foe. Disbelief in revelation is a matter with which the Gospel has no great difficulty in contending at any time. It is a cold, a negative, and an unattractive thing, alien to even those yearnings of man which remain in him, after his wreck, towards his Maker. And therefore it has not been positive worldly unbelief which the church has ever had most immediately and most vitally to contend with; but it has been error grounded upon misbelief. Now Phariseism fixed its holdfast, so to speak, in the very strongest place of the law: it was the carrying out in extreme of that which God had indisputably given, and of that which signalized God's people among the people of the earth. The Pharisees dwelt in the very recess of Judaism; and when their hostility was awakened, the whole of the old system and those who clung to it were arrayed against the Christian faith. We now have come to that point. The first victim to that hostility was the first martyr St. Stephen. In his apologetic speech we see fully the elements of hostility arrayed one against another; Israel "according to the flesh" holding itself out as the chosen people of God; making out (and in doing so even deserting the strong hold of Israel itself, which was, a spiritual religion and a spiritual God) that the "holy place" at Jerusalem, and the customs which Moses gave, were the standing point and the rallying point of God's people for ever. We find testimony abundant against that in that long speech of St. Stephen, the surface of which rather than the depth of it, we skimmed and went through last Sunday week. Now then, that first act, so to speak, of the hostility of Judaism against the church is accomplished, and we see in this portion which we are about to explain to-day the results of it.

Now let one or two things just be noticed, that we may not go astray in attributing to the then church a position familiar to our minds, but which it did not yet hold. It does not follow, that because Judaism proper, that is, Pha-

risaism, was hostile to the gospel at this time, therefore the believers in Christ had in any sense ceased to be Jews. They had not. They were as yet thorough and entire Jews. They were as yet keeping the Jewish times of worship, observing the Law as much as possible, without a doubt in their minds, as far as we can judge, at present, that things were ever to be otherwise: for this needed revealing by a special vision to him who stood in this matter foremost among the Apostles afterwards. They were as yet more truly Jews than was the Jewish church itself, as we have on more than one occasion shewn you already. Remember this; and remember, that every thing of which we read as to their going out from Jerusalem and preaching the gospel, was not in pursuance of a principle, as it would be with us, knowing as we do that we are commissioned to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"; but every extension of this kind was with them, so to speak, a breaking of bounds; it was a new thing done; it was a going beyond the limits, not indeed which our Lord in his injunction before his Ascension had assigned to them, but beyond the limits which their own ideas had ever as yet put and realized for the extension of Christ's church.

Well, then, first we read that "Saul was consenting to his death"; a trait which is taken up again by and by in the 3^d verse, where we will take it up again more at length. We may just remark at present the undoubted hand of St. Paul himself in this narrative; because the very words which are here used, "Saul was consenting unto his death", are the words which he also uses in one of his subsequent confessions, where he speaks of the part which he took with regard to the Lord's martyr St. Stephen. In the 22nd chapter and the 20th verse he says, "When the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death". And it is not that our translators have chosen the same English word when the original was different; for it is the same, and that a long and a remark-

able word, in the original likewise. All these notices are of some interest.

“And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem”. So that it would appear that not only the authorities of the Jews, not only the Sanhedrim, who appear to have been the only ones immediately concerned in the death of St. Stephen, but the people of the Jews also took great part in this persecution against the church: because it hardly could have been general, it hardly could have been such as to scatter them away from Jerusalem, which it did, unless it had been throughout the people themselves. It may seem strange that it should be so, considering what progress the gospel had been making, at any rate in the 6th chapter, and indeed before that once or twice, among the Jewish people. But it is quite enough to say, that the new element of hostility had now sprung up. They began to see that this new religion was not to be a carrying out of the Law, but was to be something which was to supersede the Law and its ordinances. As is very often the case with regard to new principles and new systems, the enemy was keener-sighted than the friend. That which the Apostles themselves were not at this time permitted to see, the Jews saw, and they persecuted the church accordingly.

And now we read for the first time of “the church which was at Jerusalem”. Notice every change of expression, for every one is important. We have never read this before: it has always been “the church” simply. Now we are passing into a new phase: there are to be more churches raised up, not only the church that is at Jerusalem, and therefore we first hear now of “the church which was at Jerusalem”.

“And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles”. There are one or two remarkable things to be noticed in this part of our verse. First, the word “all”. This word must evi-

dently be taken in a popular sense, and must not be considered to mean that every single believer in Christ was scattered abroad except the Apostles; because we by and by read that "Saul made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison". That he could not have done within Jerusalem, if they had all left. So that you must understand this to mean a general dispersion. When we use such words, we use them generally with exceptions: and so they must be here taken. Next, the places into which they were scattered abroad;—"the regions of Judea and Samaria". And notice that this is the very order in which our Lord before his ascension had commanded them to testify the gospel. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem";—that was over; it was over at least in its entirety; Jerusalem had begun to reject the gospel of Christ, and consequently the gospel of Christ had begun to be withdrawn from it;—"in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria". Here then we have the precise order followed; just what I led you to expect in beginning the book, that we should find that command of the Lord an index to the whole of its contents, and that the Evangelist St. Luke just writes in order the spreading of the gospel, first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth.

But they were all scattered throughout these regions (we will say more about Samaria by and by) "except the Apostles". Now certainly this does seem remarkable enough, that the Apostles themselves, who no doubt would bear the head and front of the persecution at Jerusalem, should have remained there. This is strange. It is strange, again, that these same Apostles, who were to be the founders of the church throughout the world, should not have gone forth on this first missionary journey; that they should have left it to others to break ground and to preach the word, as by and by we find they did, in the 4th verse—"they that were

scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"—without their own presence. Several reasons may be given for this remarkable tarrying of the Apostles in Jerusalem. There was a very ancient tradition, which we need not adopt as it stands, that the Apostles were ordered by our Lord to remain twelve years at Jerusalem. I say we need not adopt it as it stands, because that time certainly overpasses the time which they did remain there. But it very likely does point at a truth; and it *may* have been the command of our Lord, that they should abide at Jerusalem longer than merely until the descent of the Spirit. This we do not know. At all events it seems as if there were some constraining power over them, and that their remaining at this remarkable time was not merely the result of expediency; because our Lord had distinctly said as a general rule, "When they persecute you in one city, flee unto another."

But there is a yet more remarkable thing in this remaining of the Apostles in Jerusalem. Every persecution strengthens the hands of the church. After the first persecution we read, you know, in the 4th chapter, that "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost". That was for a sign and an encouragement to them at the time. It seems perhaps, in its immediate power, to have passed away with the occasion and with the remarkable prayer then uttered. Now, after this greater expansion of persecution, they were filled with the Holy Spirit not merely as a sign, but in order to go forth and to preach the word of Christ. And we may well trace (and it has been traced by most of those who have gone at all deeply into the spirit of the narrative) that the Lord here was pleased to keep the Apostles at Jerusalem, and to send forth private individual Christians to preach the gospel elsewhere, to shew, that He was not dependant upon ecclesiastical office, or the power and dignity given to certain men, for the dispersion of his gospel, but that He had made every Christian to be a declarer of and a

missionary for his gospel at his own proper time and in his own way. "They that were dispersed" (there is no distinction you see between them) "went everywhere preaching the word".

And here, again, we hear first of this expression, "the word"; an expression which afterwards becomes so common. It was before this, "the word of God", or "the word of Christ", "the word of the gospel"; as it is indeed sometimes afterwards; it becomes now "the word", which has gone forth, and which is to go out eventually to the ends of the world.

But some more notices are inserted, which will be interesting to us before we pass to the narrative of what was done in Samaria. "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him". Who were these "devout men?" According to the whole analogy of the narrative, not Christians. The expression is one that is usually employed to signify a pious man among the Jews, tending very likely towards the adoption of the doctrine of Christ, but not yet fully come into it. Ananias, indeed, is called by this name, who was a disciple at Damascus, and he was a Christian. But still, if these had been Christians, I think they would have been otherwise designated; they would hardly have been merely called pious men, but "those that believed," or perhaps, anticipating an expression which has not indeed been used yet, "some of the brethren." It would appear then, if we are right in our understanding of this, that there yet were among the Jews many who leaned towards the gospel of Christ, and who were sufficiently strong in their attachment, although they had not yet adopted it, to come forward on an occasion of this kind, and to take up the body of one who had actually been put to an ignominious death, to bury him, and make lamentation over him. If so, perhaps they came to their conversion in Jerusalem, although we do not see that they did.

"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering

into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison". It appears then, that he already had authority from that chief council, of which, as we know, he was a member; because he says in one of his confessions afterwards, the one which we alluded to just now, that when St. Stephen was brought up to be condemned, he gave this vote against him. He must have been then, although called "a young man", as indeed was the usage of that expression, more than thirty years old at this particular time; because that was the minimum of age fixed for a member of the Sanhedrim or great council. The expressions used, we cannot help feeling, bear with them the traces of his deep penitence—the traces of that abomination of his former course, which no doubt he felt when looking over and over, and participating with his friend and his secretary St. Luke in the writing of this book, under the inspiration of the Spirit. The word is a remarkable one: it is one used of a wild beast tearing and spoiling a flock: and our translators have very well rendered it by "made havock of". He tore and ravaged the church.

Well, then, the 4th verse we have already spoken of. "They who were dispersed went every where preaching the word". The expression "went *every where*" is perhaps a little too strong: the word is merely, went through their course where they did go; it does not mean of course that as yet they went into other countries but Judea und Samaria.

Now then we pass to the *second* of this set of seven who were ordained for a special purpose in the 6th chapter, and we have to speak of his acts. Already, you know, Stephen has been signalized as a remarkable witness to the truth of Christ, and as the first of the noble army of martyrs: now we have Philip, another of the same seven. Now it would appear certainly from this, that the Lord *disposed* that which the church *proposed*. They proposed to have these seven men ordained or set apart merely for eleemosynary purposes, to superintend the fair distribution of the alms to the

widows of the two great sections into which the church was then divided. But God immediately took up one of them, Stephen, and endowed him with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that he testified with great might, which none could resist, to the truth of Christ. Now here is the second of them, Philip. This is the one who is afterwards in this same book called "the evangelist"; not the Apostle. It is a remarkable fact, that very many of the early fathers mistook him for Philip the Apostle, and dealt with him as being such: but that he was not, the statement before, that the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, will very plainly declare. He is the same who is afterwards called "the evangelist", in the 21st chapter and the 8th verse. We find him there dwelling in Cæsarea, married and having four daughters, virgins, who prophesied; that is, who had the power of the Spirit upon them to speak to and edify the church. He was most likely called "the evangelist" from the circumstance of his having been, as this narrative tells us, the first to preach and declare the gospel elsewhere than at Jerusalem.

"And Philip coming down to a city of Samaria was preaching Christ to them": or, "preached Christ to them". The same expression, "a city", or "the city", "of Samaria", is used in the 4th chapter of St. John: and no one reading this passage should forbear or forget to connect it with the narrative in that chapter, for this, indeed, derives a great part of its interest from that narrative. Let us just go back and trace over the features of it. The only instance in which our Lord preached himself, and declared his own mission, out of the promised land of Judea, was when He went to a city of Samaria, Sychar, and there abode two days, and declared there to the woman of Samaria, far more plainly than ever he did among the Jews, that which He was, and that which He came to do. We have Him, indeed, travelling northward, even into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon; but then we do not hear that He thus proclaimed himself. He travelled there most probably for the same purpose as that for which He

went on another occasion into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, to avoid the presence and hostility of the Pharisees, because his "hour was not yet come". But in this city of Samaria we have Him declaring very wonderful things about himself. He speaks of "the fields" being "already white unto the harvest", using that expression doubtless metaphorically and spiritually: he speaks to the Apostles of lifting up their eyes upon those fields, in a way which shews that He intends that future things are to be done there. All that was a promise then, which was to be fulfilled: and I suppose that directly they were scattered away from Jerusalem, the believers would naturally turn their eyes to that spot, as being one specially hallowed, and in which special associations were found from the Lord's having been there and having preached there.

Philip then went to this city; in all probability the same, for the peculiar expression "the city of Samaria" is also in St. John; and he "preached to them Christ." "And the multitudes gave attention to the things spoken by Philip with one accord, while they heard him, and while they saw the signs which he did. For many who had unclean spirits, the spirits came out of them, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralytic and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city". Is it not a simple and interesting account, when regarded as the sequel of that which happened in the 4th chapter of St. John? We there find that those men came forth to Jesus; that they believed, not because of the saying of the woman, but because of his own word. "We have heard him", they said, "and are convinced that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world". And now, upon hearing of Him and the important things which had been done by Him, they received him at once; "there was great joy in that city", and multitudes of them believed, both men and women.

But there is a circumstance mentioned which we will go on with, and then return to the character of these persons, because it is very characteristic, and because it refers most especially to the bringing in of this new phase of the church

on which we enter to day. "But a certain man, by name Simon, was before in the city exercising magic and deceiving the people of Samaria, saying that he was some great one: to whom they gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God. And they attached themselves to him, because that for a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. Then Simon also himself believed, and being baptized attached himself to Philip, and seeing wonders and signs taking place was astonished". Now in this man we find one of those who were so commonly found at this time in the great break, up of religions, so to speak, throughout the Gentile world; men pretending to communications with the infernal powers, pretending to what was called the art of magic, which indeed, in one form or other of superstitious belief, lingered in the church and out of the church, even down almost to the times of our fathers. We find these persons up and down the world in that day. There is another of them for instance in the first missionary journey of St. Paul, Elymas the sorcerer. Several of them we read of: one most remarkable one, called Apollonius of Tyana, who was a favorite parallel of the heathen against our Lord Jesus Christ, they comparing his miracles with those of our Lord; and several others whom I need not mention. The most abandoned of men you very often find, in the history of these times, attaching to themselves one of these persons. We find for instance, that the emperor Tiberius had one. Elymas was attached, not to an abandoned person, but to the governor of Cyprus, who afterwards became a Christian. Their influence was immense. As I said, it was the time of the break up of various religions. Almost all educated men were persuaded in their own minds that there was no truth in any of them; they regarded them all with equal contempt. But there is a religious element in the mind of man which

cannot be thus satisfied; and you almost always find that in proportion to disbelief is superstition, and the rise and progress of these persons may be accounted for on this principle. To this man's name, Simon Magus as he is called, or Simon the Magician, a great many beliefs attach themselves which I need not mention to you, and some historical accounts which we know not whether to believe or not. He is generally regarded as having been the founder of that great sect, or rather conglomeration of sects, called Gnostics, which so much troubled the early Christian church: whether justly or not we cannot say; for we hardly know anything of him but what we read in this chapter. The other scattered notices are matters of traditional record. This much only is certain, from what we read respecting him: he was of great account in the city of Samaria, he had deceived the people, and they followed after him.

Now next time (please God we are spared so long) we shall have occasion to notice a characteristic of these Samaritans, which appears in the circumstance of the Apostles being sent down to them, or rather in the inference from that circumstance; that they were easily attached to one or another person who came to them, and who was a person of power, and capable of leading a multitude. We find something of this, although there it was exercised well and laudably, in their very simple and very quick attachment to the belief that our Lord was the Christ. We find it again in the joy which they shewed when Philip came to them and preached the Gospel to them, multitudes of men and women attaching themselves to him. We find it again in the circumstance that this man Simon had obtained such power over them. And this was the character given of them; they were easily led. They were persons who were themselves Gentiles, but believing part of the Jewish law, holding the ordinance of circumcision, so that there was no difficulty about admitting them into the church on that ground: and they were just of that easy quick movement of mind which characterizes some persons at the

present day, able to be turned apparently and directed by talented and experienced people.

Let us now proceed to examine a little into the individual character of this Simon; because what we read of him here seems to require that examination. As far as we know (and indeed we might infer it if we did not know it) the persons who practised this pretended art of magic were almost universally—or I might have dropped the qualification—were universally persons of utterly abandoned character. Simon himself we know well, from what St. Peter said about him in our next portion, was “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” That is a key to his character. Then how are we to understand what is here said about him? I believe that we are to understand it thus. Simon saw his followers dropping off; and he was himself astonished at the miracles wrought by Philip. He therefore thought it best himself to acknowledge the superior power which he saw working in the gospel of Christ. He attached himself to Philip, and was baptized like the rest. The usual word is made use of respecting him; he “believed”: and I think it rather teaches us something about that word, that it is thus made use of; it teaches us that perhaps in other places that word may mean the outward profession of belief rather than the inward change of heart, because there evidently was none in Simon. Simon himself became a believer—became a professed Christian—“believed”, as the technical expression may be. It does not appear that the preaching of the gospel had made any impression on his heart; but he accounted for what he saw in his own fashion. He thought, from the works which Philip did, that he was in league with some powerful spirit; and he viewed baptism as an initiation into communion with that spirit; and therefore he expected that he should be able to make use of the higher power which he should thus gain, for his own purposes, and unite this new magical power with his own. All who were baptized professed belief in Jesus as the Messiah. He had no scruple about that: any

means to his end he was ready to adopt and to carry through. So that we need not be astonished at finding that Simon himself believed, and was baptized, and attached himself to Philip.

We will not advance any further now with the history, because it involves, very important consideration, viz. the going down of the Apostles (which is the next thing) to Samaria, which we have not time to day to enter upon; and to complete Simon's career would be to anticipate that coming down of the Apostles. But now just let us see, before we part, where we stand with regard to the church's progress. We have finished, as I told you, the first portion of its history; we have begun the second. That second finds its termination at the 10th chapter: and I hope (please God) we may be able this season to continue our history as far as the termination of this portion at least, and to bring in the Gentiles, who have not been yet touched in the history, into the church of Christ: and I hope and trust that at some future time, if it please God, we may be able to continue the history further than that; and indeed I am not altogether without hope that we may carry out the history of the church in this book. But however that may be, let us now look at the position in which we stand, at the threshold of debate and uncertainty in the church upon the great question which is just beginning to dawn upon us, *of whom* it was to consist—how far it was to extend. And every incident in this portion is full of interest; because it was the great question, the great battle field in the Acts of the Apostles, and the great battle field of St. Paul in his various important epistles—the great question of justification by faith and not by the works of the law,—the great question of the Lord Jesus being made in the flesh of all men, and of all men having an equal right in Him by faith as their Saviour. We cannot then overrate the immense importance of this matter which is now dawning upon us. The Samaritans were, so to speak, the point of transition between Jew and Gentile: they were Jews,

in as much as they were circumcised; they were Gentiles in as much as they were not of Jewish descent, and had never joined themselves to the people of God—had never become keepers of the whole law, or anything like the whole law; they did not in fact observe any part of the Levitical law properly so called: so that they formed just the transition between the two. The early church was then on the balance; the question being whether she should retreat back and find her home in Jerusalem, and become a church for Jew and not for Gentile, or whether she should burst through the bounds, and preach the gospel, as the Lord had declared that the gospel was to be preached to every one, “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel”. The question has now long been solved. It is one which seems to have lost its interest for us; though, indeed, it has not lost its interest; because, as I just now said, so much depends upon it and goes with it. Let us try to revive that interest, in reading this book; and we shall find new light move over its letters, and each sentence, as it is viewed, will justify its own place, and its connection with the whole.

HOMILY XVI.

CHAPTER VIII. 14—40.

It may be necessary to recall to your minds exactly the place at which we stand in the history of the primitive church. We have done with Jerusalem as the exclusive, or even as the principal habitation of the church of Christ. The church is fast migrating away from that Jewish people which rejected the Lord, and which had now, after his glorification, deliberately declared again that they "would not have Him to reign over them." We are just now in that transition state between the Jewish and the Gentile church, wherein various things are done and said and prescribed by the Lord, which are not to be referred to with certainty as regulating the whole usage of the church hereafter, but which belonged to the particular time, and to the difficulties and feelings which were then among believers. God had providentially brought about a dispersion of the disciples by means of the persecution which arose about Stephen. All but the Apostles were scattered from Jerusalem; they remained there; and the sacred history follows the course of one, the next in order of the seven deacons to him who had been honoured in being made the first martyr of Christ. "Philip went down to the city of Samaria," in strict accordance with our Lord's command in the beginning of this same book, that they should be "witnesses to Him in Judæa and in Samaria and unto the ends of the earth." He preached the gospel in Samaria; and the last thing which we

heard was that it was received with "great joy" in the city; and that among others a celebrated sorcerer, named Simon, who had seduced and deceived the people with witchcrafts, being struck by the greatness of the power manifested by Philip,—“himself”, in the wide and outward acceptance of the word, “believed also, and was baptized, and continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done”. Of him we will say nothing more in this recapitulation; but by and by we shall have to recur to him.

What we now read is, “Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost”. Now there has been, and meritedly, some difficulty found in this account of the mission of the two Apostles down to Samaria. Why was it, exactly, that they were sent? What had they to do when they came there? Now we must seek the answer to these questions in the circumstances of the narrative itself: and they will be best replied to, by putting one or two other questions, in the answer to which we may evolve something like an idea of the other. Are we to suppose that the Apostles went down to Samaria to establish a rule for the church, that such was to be the completion of the Sacrament of Baptism for all future ages of the church? I answer, Decidedly not. Such was not, as matter of fact, the completion of baptism in the after history of the Scripture itself. Such was not the completion of it even in a case which comes immediately following this, and which, if our time suffice, we may be able to deal with to-day. We cannot imagine (and the case has been exceedingly well put in Calvin’s commentary on this place, which I

would recommend you to consult, as many as have access to it) that the Sacrament of Baptism, if faithfully and properly received in the name of Jesus Christ, could have been so imperfect as this hypothesis would suppose. That sacrament involved the confession of the name of Jesus Christ; it involved engrafting into the body of Christ, his outward and professing church; and where faithfully received would require no such supplement as this idea would suppose. Nor indeed does the church of England, in her rite of Confirmation, make any such supposition as this at all: in fact she distinctly contradicts any such supposition; for she refers back to the reception of the Holy Spirit in the ordinance of Baptism, and does not leave it to be conferred originally at Confirmation. There is in that service a distinct recognition of the former reception of the Holy Spirit, and a prayer for an increase of his influence proportioned to the maturer light which is now opening on the newly confirmed: and it is merely stated that the laying on of hands in that ordinance is done "after the example of the holy Apostles", and "to certify them, by this sign, of God's favor and goodness towards them"; and no institution of the Apostles as binding upon the church of Christ is referred to, nor is it grounded upon that. And in the regulations for the reception of the Lord's supper, the ordinance itself is put on exactly the same footing, or at least it is implied that it is, when it is said, that none shall receive the Lord's supper "until they be confirmed, or be ready and desirous of being confirmed"; thereby, you see, taking out the point of any influence of the rite, as such, without which their Christian state would be imperfect. So that we must give up, as indeed most good churchmen, now I believe do give up, such a supposition as that. It is not the place here to argue such a matter as this out or at length: I would only again refer you to the remarks of Calvin, either in the original, or as you will find them equally well in the edition of Calvin published by the "Calvin translation Society."

Then another hypothesis occurs to us. Was it from any

defect in the ministration of the Evangelist Philip? Here, again, I think we must certainly say, it was not. The very ground on which we put that preaching of the gospel far and wide without the help of the Apostles, as a distinct act of God's providence, to shew that every Christian empowered by God's Spirit and raised up in the order of the church was just as capable of proclaiming Christ and of receiving believers in Christ as the very highest in the order of that church, would at once do away with an answer in the direction in which we are now pointing. It could not be that Philip's ministration was defective. Indeed we find afterwards that, when he was "caught away by the Spirit of the Lord" from the Ethiopian eunuch and was "found at Azotus", he "went through and he evangelized all the cities until he came to Cæsarea": so that his work was not wanting in the power of God's help in evangelizing the cities where he went.

Nor are we to suppose (and this is another idea which has been started) that there was a defect in the recipients of the word of God at Samaria. Now this, I own, appears at first sight much more likely than either of the others. We have seen, and we have been able to corroborate it by external evidence too, that the Samaritans were a yielding people, and were easily influenced. They were easily influenced for good, as we see in the 4th chapter of John. We find again, that they were wrought upon by Simon in the opposite direction, and were led astray by him. We find again that, when Philip was preaching the gospel, they received it with joy, and were then led after him in the good direction. So that there seems to have been something easily acted upon in these Samaritan converts. But neither, again, do I think that this was the reason why the Apostles were sent down to Samaria; because if it had been, so very careful and minute a noter of all the circumstances as St. Luke is, would certainly have given us a hint of the kind; whereas all that he does say he speaks to the praise of these Samaritan converts: great numbers of

them believed, and there was great joy in the city, when they heard the preaching of Philip about the kingdom of Christ; there is no hint given that they were unworthy or untrustworthy converts at all.

Then what are we to believe? We have rejected three hypotheses. I think we must take refuge in this, which is not at all unlikely, and which seems to contain the whole pith of the matter. As yet the church was in an uncertain state, as regarded its spread out from Jerusalem and from pure Judaism; every step forward was a step in advance of the Jerusalem church; and we must remember how strongly opposed the Jewish believers must have been, all but the Apostles themselves, who were specially gifted by God's Spirit (and even they themselves did not know to what they were called) to the progress of the church onward from Jerusalem. Now this was the first step taken in that direction. The Samaritans were, it is true, circumcised; they had the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses; so far they rendered allegiance to the law of God as declared to the Jewish people: but they were not Jews; indeed "the Jews had no dealings" with them. A great many of the Jews would regard the admission of the Samaritans into the church with objection: and therefore, very likely, on this occasion,—to confirm the work of Philip as God's doing (because they were specially set up by God to confirm and guide the church), these two Apostles went down.

Then you may observe that God himself appears to have sanctioned their going down by the especial bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit. I concede that God himself at that time did withhold those special gifts of the Spirit till the Apostles went down: they expressly conveyed them by their own hands. And thus we find, indeed, in this view of the subject, if it be the right one, that this is not an act to be drawn into an example, but that it was for a sign to the church of that time. It was to heal up the possible breach which might have taken place, so that there might have

been the Jewish and the Samaritan church standing opposite one another, instead of working with one another in the faith of Christ. When the Apostles went down, they saw what had taken place, and they confirmed what had taken place; so that there could be no question any longer among Christian men, the highest authority in the Lord's church having pronounced it to be a valid reception, that the Samaritans were indeed members of Christ's church, in the fulness of that relation.

They then went down, and "prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) They laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Now we revert to this remarkable person whose name we mentioned before, and who had believed in some sense of the word, not indeed, as we see, in a worthy sense of the word, and attached himself to Philip the evangelist. "But when Simon saw that by means of laying on of the hands of the Apostles the Holy Spirit was given, he brought them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit". We clearly see by this circumstance how completely in a state of darkness this Simon was with regard to the whole gospel message, the nature of it, and the intent of it. We see that his attaching himself to Philip was in reality from a motive the description of which I quoted to you in my last exposition from Neander, namely, that he thought Philip was in communion with some more powerful spirit than his own, and he thought that by attaching himself to him he should gain also connection with this more powerful spirit, and be able to turn it to more gain for his own purposes. Now you see that view, because he brought them money. We all of us see, and we all of us abominate of course, the spirit of this man. There is, you know, a sin, the name of which has been confined hitherto to the act when committed by a minister of Christ, but which may at the same time be

committed by any member of Christ's professing church, which we call by a name derived from this incident, "Simony": and apply, in our meaning of it, to the purchase by worldly wealth of situations in the church and ministry of Christ. But does not, I may ask, the same sin run through the whole practice of many Christian persons, using religion for worldly purposes? Is it not just as much, if we choose to make use of the word in the wider acceptance, simony, just as much the sin which this man committed, to take your religion and to make it the means of gaining a better character and repute among men—to take it and to make it the means of more comfort, of more advance in life, of complying with that which is the custom or the fashion among those whom you value? Is not this, in fact, just the same sin? It is not offering to "purchase the gifts of God with money" actually; but it is making use of them for worldly purposes; it is turning them to a depraved and degraded use; just as Simon wished to do by the offer which he made to St. Peter.

Let us see how St. Peter met it. "But Peter said to him, thy money perish with thee"—thy money together with thyself tend to destruction. Money, we know, perishes. It is remarkable that the same Apostle, in speaking of that wherewith we were redeemed, says that it was not with "corruptible gold and silver". How we see little threads of truth running through especially the speeches of St. Peter in the Acts, and the sayings of St. Peter in his epistles. There is not a more interesting digging under the surface of scripture, than may be performed by comparing these two. And I think that it has been almost a special providence that it is so; because we have had the second epistle called in considerable question; and nothing is more calculated to remove the doubt respecting it, than the expressions which are common to that second epistle and to the speeches of St. Peter in the Acts and in the Gospels. "Thy money", then, "perish with thee". He speaks in the fervour of his heart. "Thou art in

the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity". Take thy money where thou art going thyself. Bring it not and offer it to ministers of God. Suppose not that they can be participators in such a degraded purpose. "Because thou thoughtest that the gift of God may be purchased with money", that thou canst purchase it by money, "there is to thee no part nor lot in this matter"—in this present discourse—the thing of which we speak—"for thy heart is not straight in the presence of God"—thou hast a double purpose. "Repent therefore of this thy iniquity, and pray the Lord, if by chance the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee". There is no conferring of absolution here upon him; there is no promise of conferring it; even though the chief of the Apostles is speaking; and that is a remarkable point. He does not say to him, Repent of this thy sin, and receive absolution of this sin; but he says, "Repent, and pray the Lord if by chance the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee". That lies in a higher power than mine: thou hast sinned "not unto men but unto God"; and God alone by Christ must forgive thee. "For I see that thou art fallen into the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity".

"Simon answered, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that nothing may come upon me of the things which ye have said." What are we to think of this prayer? We are to judge of it, I believe, by after—indications of the character of the same man. Now these after—indications may be gathered both from the Jewish historian and from the tradition of the church, neither of which we need reject in this case. The Jewish historian tells us, writing of incidents of from ten to twenty years after this time, the following fact. At that period the procurator of Judea was Felix, and Felix, you know, conceived an unholy lust for Drusilla; and he followed on this by means of the agency of one Simon a Jew, who was related to be a magician, and who was sent to her, and persuaded her to leave her husband, and to consort with Felix. That is part of his history. There can be very little doubt that it is the same

man. The tradition of the church says much more of his character, and gives him out to have been the founder, in fact, of that most troublesome and pertinacious sect of not only ignorant, but immoral heretics, who troubled the peace of the early church under the name of Gnostics. We know, therefore, from those indications that this prayer was just nothing. He was terrified at the moment by the denunciation (which no doubt was spoken in the power of the Spirit, which no doubt cowed and awed his spirit) of the apostle Peter; and he uttered this cry, as it were, for mercy, which passed from him and left no impression.

Now this, again, like all these warnings in the history of the early church, is a very solemn one. We had one of Ananias and Sapphira; and then the jealous God purged out from the midst of his people at once the beginning of the working of the leaven of falsehood. Here, again, we see how entirely the Apostles, the servants of God, (and this would have been a reason in Providence for their going down to Samaria, if there was no other) kept themselves apart from and disclaimed, cast off from them, and "shook off the dust of their feet" against, the idea of connecting the pursuit of and the conferring of the gifts of God with ordinary gain. Let this be a lesson to us all, that we seek not in serving one Master to serve another master likewise, for it cannot be done, and God will not have it.

"They, therefore, when they had finished their testimony, and had spoken the word of the Lord, turned back to Jerusalem, and evangelized many villages of the Samaritans". There is a slight recollection in this expression of what is related in the 9th chapter of St. Luke, where we read that "they entered into a certain village of the Samaritans". One of these Apostles was the agent and speaker on that occasion. These Samaritans would not receive the Lord, because his face was set for Jerusalem; and this same Apostle St. John, who was now evangelizing these villages, said with his brother St. James, "Wilt thou that we command fire to come

down from heaven and consume them?" And now we have this same Apostle evangelizing the villages of the Samaritans. Such is the power of the Spirit of the Lord, in changing the lion into the lamb.

"But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Rise up and journey to the south, along the road which descends from Jerusalem to Gaza, that road which is a desert one." There were two paths which led from Jerusalem to Gaza, as we know by those very useful things which have been left us from antiquity, the old itineraries. One of them led through two or three remarkable cities: another led through very few remarkable places, but across a considerable tract of desert; and that is the one here described. You are aware, perhaps, as many as have read this passage carefully, that some people refer the "desert" to Gaza, that *the city of Gaza* was desert at this time. But I cannot conceive that this can be the case. In the first place, it cannot be said to have been so, in any proper meaning of the word; and in the next place, if it was, it could not have anything to do with the narrative, which is given as designating the one of the two ways which the evangelist was to take.

"And he rose up and went." Observe how immediately, without question, the commands of God and the messages of God are obeyed by these holy men in the primitive church. Now as yet we have had the gospel proclaimed to the Jews, preached also to the Samaritans, and received doubtless by many who, although Jews by belief, were Europeans by birth. I dare say you remember an old prophecy which said, that "Japheth should dwell in the tents of Shem". Shem, you know, was the progenitor of the Asiatics, Japheth of the Europeans. These two, Japheth dwelling in the tents of Shem, the Europeans received among the Jews, not of themselves or as a people of themselves, had already received the gospel. But there was one race, upon which hung heavy and dark the original curæ of the primeval period after the flood. Ham, and Canaan the descendant of Ham,

and his descendants, were to be "the servants of servants to their brethren". And now it pleased God, by means of taking in a foreigner of this race into the church of Christ, to shew that there was distinction neither of descent nor of any physical condition nor of rank in life which should bound the blessings of his gospel hereafter. "Behold, an Ethiopian man". How minute the distinctions are. He was not a Jew. He was not dwelling in the land of Ethiopia as many Jews were, and all over the world. No, he was by race an Ethiopian. "An Ethiopian man, an eunuch, a nobleman under the service of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her wealth, who had gone up to worship at Jerusalem, was returning, and sitting in his chariot was reading the prophet Isaiah." Now let us again figure to ourselves the situation of this man. He had been, from some cause or other not related to us, probably by the presence of Jews in his own native country, and at the command of his own queen, inspired with such a love of the true God and his service, as was rare indeed to find; he had gone up from an immense distance, from Meroë in Upper Egypt, for there it was that queen Candace reigned. "Candace" was not her name, so much as her title; just as "Pharaoh" was the title of the kings of Egypt. He had gone up from there to Jerusalem to worship. He was returning; he had passed through the habitations of men and their cities, and he was now come to a desert. He was reading; this his occupation shewing indeed, that his prayer had been no matter of form, but the very desire of his heart. He opened the book of the prophet Esaias, and there he was reading aloud. And the part of that book which he was reading, was one, to him, of deep interest. It is a subject upon which it is impossible to dwell; but you must be aware (and a hint may be thrown out on the subject) that he was one, who was excluded from the congregation of the Lord.* But there is in the 56th chapter of Isaiah, from the 3rd to the 6th verses, a promise for those

* See Deut XXIII. 1.

unhappy people, by which it is said that God will give them "a name better than of sons and of daughters", a name and a place in his temple and his house, if they fear him and seek his name. That was the promise upon which he had begun to settle; and he was reading the 53rd chapter, which forms in the division of the Hebrew Bible the beginning of the section into which that 56th enters. And doubtless it was a passage endeared to his heart; one which conveyed comfort to him, and which caused promises to spring forth in the desert of his own mind and his own physical situation; which made him joyful, and made him for the future a happy man. He was reading, then, in this passage. But the beginning of it conveyed to him an enigma. He read the passage where it was written (the 53rd chapter of Isaiah we all know) "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, he opened not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and his generation who shall declare? for his life is removed from the earth". This was spoken of some servant of the Lord; of whom, the eunuch could not tell.

"And the Spirit said to Philip, Go near, and attach thyself to this chariot." Philip ran up, and heard him reading that passage. In all probability we may say, that he was reading in the Greek translation of the Septuagint version, with which he as a foreigner would be most conversant; for it was the language spoken in all the courts of the civilized world at that time. Philip then heard him reading this, and said to him, "Dost thou understand what thou readest?" Is this reading of thine merely a devout act of the will and of the mouth (an act far better, be it noticed, than not reading, and neglecting) or is it an act of the understanding? Hast thou a knowledge of Him to whom these words refer? The eunuch answered with humility, "No, for how can I, except some one guide me?" He was willing to be led. He had met in the desert path with this man coming up to him so wonderfully; he recognized, we may well suppose, and I think the narrative requires it, the guidance of God;

he saw one sent to teach him "and he invited Philip to come up and set with him". Then comes a description, which I have already given you, of the passage which he was reading; a passage well-known to every Christian child, as being the minutest description of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus which could possibly be given, even had it been written upon a sight of those sufferings.

"And the eunuch answered to Philip, and said, I pray thee, concerning whom does the prophet say this? concerning himself, or concerning some one else?" A very natural question; because it is the "servant" of the Lord that is described in that passage. The prophet was eminently a servant of the Lord: or he might be describing some other servant of the Lord. The Jews anciently interpreted this passage of the Messiah. They now profess to interpret it of some just and holy man in general. It is evidently a mere vague evasion, because the passage will not answer to the description of any such ordinary person. There is another way in which they explain it, as indicating the fall and the rise again of the whole Jewish people: but here, again, it is equally inapplicable.

"And Philip opened his mouth". This is the usual expression for the commencement of a teaching. Of our Lord it is said that "when he was set his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying". In Peter's discourse to the Gentiles, the first discourse, which he made, in the house of Cornelius, to a Gentile assemblage of those who wished to be Christians, it is said that "Peter opened his mouth, and said". It is the commencement of a set of teaching. And indeed it was the commencement of a set of teaching to Ethiopia—a teaching for the ends of the world, extending to the very ends of it, at the mere infancy of which we, even at the present day, are living. "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this scripture he preached unto him"—he evangelized him with—"Jesus;" he gave him the good news of Jesus.

"And as they were going on by the way, they came to a certain water." There is, I believe, on that very road one solitary fountain to the present day, which is reported to have been the place where this happened, and may have been so. "They came to a certain water: and the eunuch said, Behold, water; what hinders me to be baptized? And he ordered the chariot to stand still." I may just mention that the 37th verse, as contained in our present copies of the scriptures, is not in the original text of the scriptures, and forms in all probability, and I may say more than probability, no part of the sacred narrative, but was most likely inserted afterwards, to suit the baptismal ideas of after times. It was thought to be an unnatural thing, that the eunuch should be baptized without a profession of faith; and therefore this was inserted:—"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Those are the words to which I allude: those are not found in the more ancient copies of the scriptures; but the text runs thus: "What hinders me to be baptized? And he ordered the chariot to stand still and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." Here then we have the distinct reception of a Gentile, and a Gentile who was prevented by circumstances from forming any part of the Jewish church, into the church of Christ as a baptized Christian. He was received as the forerunner of that "great company, which no man can number", of Gentiles, the actual beginning of the admission of whom we shall find in a more solemn and public manner brought about by God, in the 10th chapter of this same book. But here we have already the prophecy beginning to be accomplished, that the Morians' land shall "stretch out her hands unto God": we have already the command of the Lord, that the gospel should be preached "in Judea, and in Samaria, and *unto the ends of the earth*", receiving its fulfilment, by his own command, and not by the pleasure of his disciples themselves.

We hear no more of this servant of God—for so we must call him, converted in this miraculous manner, and going “his way rejoicing” (that is all we hear) into the furthest parts of the earth—into the court of his queen—where, very likely, he may have become himself a missionary of Jesus Christ, and may have converted many to the faith. Some, indeed, suppose (as may possibly be the case) that the present Abyssinian church, peculiar in some of her views both of worship and of Christian custom, derived her origin from that circumstance. Whether that be so or not, we cannot say. That church is in an exceedingly degraded state at the present time; and it is almost impossible to trace many of its practices to other than corruption of a gross kind. We hear no more. It is one of those things which God has concealed from us; which we may follow a little way, the eunuch being so marvellously brought into meeting with the Evangelist, assisted in the faith, and taught in the faith; but further we cannot go. “When they were come up from the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” He cared not to see him; he was so full of joy at what had happened to him. He received the gospel in the power thereof: he went his way home full of gladness, having found that which “prophets and kings” had not found.

“But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through, he evangelized all the cities until he came to Cæsarea”—all that coast—that coast of Philistia which formed indeed part of the inheritance of the tribe of Judah, but which never was thoroughly conquered from the Gentiles. All that coast, with Jews resident in it (and to them it is probable that Philip immediately preached) was evangelized, and was brought more or less into the knowledge of Christ. We shall have a great deal more to do with that part of the holy land, before we advance much further in our history. Joppa was one of the cities in which he was to preach; Lydda was another; Saron was another; all by and by coming into

the narrative again. He went to Cæsarea, which became afterwards his own residence, and where we find him, in the 21st chapter, living with his "four daughters, who were virgins and prophesied", they also declaring the name of Christ. All these places were brought in by this minister of God. That map, perhaps, is one that we may be able to study, when all the mysteries of the gospel are revealed to us; we may look back on it as the seaman looks back upon the chart of his way. We may see what treasures of knowledge there are lying under the surface, and may adore the grace and the wisdom of God as we advance in the faith.

Now what we have to-day gone through, brethren, brings us one step further. See how every part of this narrative fits into its place. It is not perhaps to be so closely followed as the gospel of St. John; but still it is all evolved, one part in order succeeding another: so that the Spirit of God in guiding St. Luke to put it down, and St. Luke himself in doing so, seem to have had in view, that the opening of God's purposes with regard to his church should be a matter made plain; although it is a matter, I am afraid, very often concealed, and not searched into by those who read this book. They regard it merely as an ordinary history, each thing seeming to have been set down by chance as it was known and recollected; and they do not stop to enquire, What place does this hold in the history of God's purposes? May you be enabled, in looking at this book and studying it, to derive the lesson, from some things at least, that there is a purpose in it: may that purpose be brought about in your own hearts, by shewing you that we have a God of wisdom, a God of power and of love, who knows in our days, just as well as He did in those days, where to plant his word, how to forward it, and to what point to carry it forward; and may it be carried forward to the utmost in our own hearts and minds, to His glory, through Jesus Christ.

HOMILY XVII.

CHAPTER IX. 1 & 2.

I have hardly any hope of being able to begin the details of the wonderful event which the commencement of this chapter relates to us this afternoon; there is so much to be said of a preliminary kind regarding the place where we now stand in the history of Christ's primitive church, and the preparation so wonderfully carried on by Him for extending that church further than the position which she now holds. Let us just, then, for a few moments review our steps. The church has as yet, you may remember, been centralized at Jerusalem. I need not go over all that I recounted last Sunday afternoon, of the wonderful dealings of God owing to which she first broke ground beyond Jerusalem. You may remember the persecution which arose about Stephen; the dispersion of the gospel through Samaria thereupon; the sending down of the two Apostles to Samaria to see and to confirm that which had been done; and the subsequent mission of Philip into the desert, there to deal with the first fruits of the heathen in the shape of the Ethiopian eunuch, who was converted to Christ and sent on his way rejoicing. But I may just say, that all that had hitherto appeared with regard to an extension beyond Jerusalem, and beyond the bounds of the chosen people, must rather be regarded as signs and tokens of what God was about to do, than as anything really begun, and to be carried on as begun. That separate effort seems to have had no

great results. There was, indeed, as we may gather from that chapter itself, if we had no other grounds, an isolated church then planted; but it did not become the seed of great things. We know no more about that Ethiopian eunuch. As I said, we may, if we please, fill up the narrative, and conceive how, going on his way rejoicing, he took the blessings of the gospel where he was going. We may, if we please, fill up the gap which history has left void, and connect that Ethiopian eunuch with the promotion of Christianity in those lands afterwards. But still there is nothing here related. There is no germ in either of those narratives of any future action of God with regard to his church on a large scale.

But now we come to the point when it becomes evident, from that which God does, that He means his church to be dispersed on a large scale throughout the world. The gospel had been offered to the Jewish people; and the Jewish people, at first flocking in numbers to the preaching of the Apostles, as it would seem seized with repentance, had at last through their rulers, and the people also, led by those rulers, deliberately rejected Jesus Christ. They had put to death his first martyr; and although that might be regarded as a tumultuous proceeding, they had yet gone on with it afterwards, by a persecution on a large scale of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. It appeared then evident that, the Jews having rejected the gospel, that glad tidings of salvation, which was to be preached first to the Jew and then to the Gentile, was now ready to be preached to the latter.

But now we may fairly ask ourselves, (and we ask ourselves, recollect, not as presumptuously saying what God should do or was likely to do, but in the full light of that which He has done, which makes a great difference in such considerations) we may well and humbly ask, How was this to be performed within the limits of God's prescribed providential agency with regard to his church and people? We have the Twelve; and we very well know, that by means of

the Apostles, that is, by means of persons directly called and commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the gospel was to be disseminated through the world. Now we may fairly ask, Do we find, within the limits of those Twelve Apostles, the materials which may seem to us, judging by that which we see had to be done, fit for doing it? We have seen already, that those Twelve Apostles seem to have been, in the early part of the church at least, almost inseparably joined to the Jewish nation and the Jewish church. The purposes of our Lord seemed to point at a connection of that kind, more or less to continue to subsist. He had joined, in his own prophetic declaration, their number with the number of the tribes of Israel: and they, in their first preaching of the gospel, were limited to the city of Jerusalem. It is true, that that limitation ended at the time of their being endued with power from on high by means of the Holy Spirit breathed on them: but still, in God's Providence, it seems to have lasted after that time; for when all else were dispersed by the persecution which arose about Stephen, the Twelve Apostles, acting no doubt in the power of the Spirit, did not leave Jerusalem.

Now if we search among that body of the twelve, little as we know respecting them personally and individually except in one or two cases, we shall not I think find, humanly speaking, those elements of which we are in search. They were all Jews. Although some of their names, and some few incidents which I have mentioned to you on one or two occasions, seem to point at a certain kind of connection with Gentiles or with Grecian Jews, they were all, we may well say, strict Jews. They had been brought up in Judaism. They were continually dwelling, in their thoughts and in their questions to the Lord Jesus, upon the restoration of the kingdom to *Israel*. These were the matters with which their thoughts were occupied. By and by we shall come to speak more at length respecting the work which had to be done, when we speak of the wonder-

ful person who was raised up to do it: but, I will only shortly say now, that we do not find, among the Apostles elements fitted for the carrying on of that work, always humanly speaking. If we look at their subsequent conduct with regard to it, though we find that doubtless they yielded when the manifestation of God's will by his Spirit was put before them, yet we do not find I think in the subsequent history of the acts of the Apostles, this book itself, that they took any active part in the dispersion of the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles, down to the period when the history of that book ends. We find on the contrary, that the chief of them even, St. Peter himself, although he had been by a heavenly vision let into the truth that the Gentiles were to be, as Gentiles, partakers of the blessings of Christ's gospel, yet even so late as some years after that time vacillated upon this point. There was a difficulty to persuade him. Although revelation persuaded, although the facts which manifested God's will persuaded when they were brought before him, yet still in his own thoughts, his own feelings, there was a difficulty and a reluctance in this matter, which extended very far on in his course: and although we may believe, and are bound to believe, that in the inspiration of the Spirit itself this was never found, yet still it is a remarkable fact that those epistles of St. Peter and St. James, addressed as they are in spirit to all Christians, are nevertheless really and actually addressed to Jewish Christians, and that the things said in them seem to belong more immediately, and in their primary meaning, to those Christians than to others.

I think we may very well say then, especially in the light, as I said, of the fact which God has been pleased to reveal to us, that it was not His pleasure, that the Gentile world should be evangelized by means of those Twelve Apostles, and that in them were not found the elements of the workmen for doing that work. But then it seems to result from that, if we are right so far, that some new apostolic power must be raised up: for it evidently was by

Apostles, that is, as I just now said, by persons commissioned expressly by the Lord himself, that this work was to be done. The Lord, then, was pleased to raise up another apostolic power. He who had called the original Twelve, was fully able to call another. He was not withdrawn from his church, so that He could not do this. He was present in the church by his Spirit, and He might have done it, if he had pleased, as he did indeed in the case of the companion to that other, by means of a revelation of the Holy Spirit. But he did it by a direct revelation from himself, appearing in person. His "arm is not shortened" by his being withdrawn from us—God forbid it, brethren. This power, which is given to Him over all in heaven and earth, is even more manifestly declared by his being at the right hand of God, there waiting till all things are put under his feet.

Well then, now we have come I think to the point where we may fairly ask ourselves, *Who is this person that the Lord was pleased to single out from the world and to call to this miraculous work which he had to do among the nations?* Now let us, in the same spirit as before, (bear that in mind) go briefly through some particulars of that work which was to be done, and some particulars respecting the person who must be summoned to do it. In the very first place, you see that it was a work to be done by means of the Jewish people. Our Lord himself was a Jew; all those whom he had commissioned were Jews; the gospel rested upon the foundation of the Old Testament; and from those simple facts it seems to follow that, speaking of course with regard to human means which God chooses for his great works, a Jew would be chosen for this work.

There is more to be said respecting this particular than merely to dismiss it thus. God had been making now for many centuries great preparations for the dispersion of his gospel by means of the Jewish people. All God's judgments, and God's afflictive dispensations with regard to his people, are not simply what they seem, but are the seeds of his

great providences to be worked out: and that captivity, which we know was the punishment of the idolatry and fickleness of the Jewish people, was by no means that punishment only, nor did its purpose end there. They became, by means of it, dispersed throughout all the coasts of the then civilized world. There is nowhere where we do not find Jews; very few large places, where we do not find a Jewish synagogue: and if you just remember what that implies, that the worship of the true God was a thing known and watched and criticised and called in question, opposed if you will, (opposition would bring it into notice) throughout the whole of the heathen world; if you reflect on that, you may well conceive how long God had been preparing for the great work which he had to do by the Jewish people. We might go even further back still. I am now, you know, going over old ground. Some of you may know that I have treated this ground before. But it is necessary here to be spoken of, in order thoroughly to introduce the event which this chapter brings before us. Those preparations might be watched even further back. You know that God has placed each of the nations of the world where they are, and "settled the bounds of their habitation". Now most remarkably did He "settle the bounds of the habitation" of his own chosen people with regard to this work. And most remarkably also did he settle the bounds of the habitation of the other people who were to be connected with them. I will only just mention one circumstance here (you may remember others) that the habitations of those two peoples, the one the advanced post, as it were, of Asia, the other that of Europe, are not dis severed from one another by a vast and trackless ocean, but that they are almost joined by a multitude of beautiful islands, which from the very first, in the imperfect state of infant navigation, tempted adventurers to pass from the one to the other. And so we find, as early as 900 years before Christ, in the time of the prophet Joel, who you know is the earliest of the prophets, charges brought against the people of Tyre,

the great commercial people of those days, of having stolen and carried away the children of Judah and Jerusalem, that they might sell them unto the Grecians far over their border. There we have then, nearly 1000 years before the birth of Christ into the world, this preparation begun. God had been carrying it on in every country, and in most places in those countries, from that time to this.

Then I say, with all this, we are fairly justified in stating that it will be a Jew who will be selected, in order to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Then if we go a little further, we may ask ourselves again, What will a Jew be able to say to those Gentiles? How will he, full of Jewish associations, steeped if you will (for such would plainly be the case) in Jewish prejudice, separated from the rest of the world, one who would not, in the language of a Latin satirist, shew the way to a person unless he worshipped with himself—how should a man of this kind be able to go into the Gentile world, to speak to people of other associations with which they have grown up, with ideas so vastly different, who would understand nothing of his religion, would treat it as a vain superstition, who would understand nothing of the way in which he would speak to them even, the way in which he would chain together one thought and another (for the links employed by oriental speech for this purpose are as different from those of the western speech as it is possible to imagine)—how should a man of this sort (for God is pleased to work by human means) ever carry the Gospel throughout the countries of the civilized world? How should he ever stand in Athens, or in Corinth, or in Rome, and proclaim “to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ?” Well then, this seems to point to another element still in this person of whom we are in search—that is to say, that he should have been not only by birth and by instruction a Jew, but should have been brought up in, and have had acquaintance with, both the language and the learning, and the modes of thought and life, of the Gentile world.

Now at present we need not go further than this regarding the *a priori* considerations, the considerations coming before the fact, but will announce the fact itself, looking upon them in the light of it. Our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to choose a person, and this person was a Jew, and he was a Jew who had been born in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia, a city inferior to none in those times for the cultivation of Grecian learning. He was originally instructed as a child in that city; and afterwards he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of that very doctor of the law who had urged reasonable conduct upon the Sanhedrim on that occasion when the Apostles were in peril of their lives, namely Gamaliel. This person was no other than the young man Saul, at whose feet the witnesses cast down their clothes at the stoning of the first martyr Stephen. Now just let us ask ourselves for a few moments what this circumstance implies. It implies, you see, a situation of direct hostility to the religion of Jesus Christ. This is a most important point. It is an important point in two different aspects; one (that we will pass over with little mention at present, though it is indeed a most important one) that it shews forth both the long-suffering and love and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, who could from the very centre of his enemies reach down his hand and pluck forth one who should be his messenger to the Gentile world; but we will dwell more at present, because it belongs more to the personal character of the man, with which we are now concerned, upon this other circumstance; the position of this man, that of extreme hostility to Christ's gospel, was the very position most of all required for one who should preach it to the Gentiles afterwards. These words may seem strange at first; but I think, if you examine them, you will find that they are justified by the fact. Saul was a Pharisee; he was one who dwelt in, and had been brought up in, the very centre of Judaism; he was a Jew entirely in every thought; he shared in that enmity which the Pharisees had to our Lord. And what was the con-

sequence of his sharing in that enmity? You may say that he had (and I dare say it was so), during the time he was in the enmity, an exaggerated view of the differences between the religion of Jesus Christ and the religion which he himself professed. He saw that the religion of Jesus Christ would be the destruction of Phariseeism; for this was the circumstance, I take it, which made the Pharisees throughout so determinately hostile as they were to the person and the work of our Lord. If He rose, they must fall. Their extreme and rigid observation of the letter of the law, conducted without regard to justice and mercy, truth and common sense, could not stand a moment before his preaching, which rested upon those as its foundations, both as they came from God, and as they were in the minds of men. This they plainly must have seen. He exposed at once their abuses; He unveiled their hypocrisy; He stood forward as one in God's truth; and, as He presses upon them so continually in the gospel of St. John, if they loved God they would have loved Him, for He stood in the ways of God and spoke the will of God. Now all this Saul, being as he was a zealous Pharisee, plainly saw: and perhaps he was, humanly speaking, the only one of the Apostles who naturally, and from his own previous training, would have been likely to have seen it from the very first. We can hardly conceive a moment (and this will put before you in a clear light I think that for which I am now contending) during which St. Paul's mind could possibly have vacillated as St. Peter's did on that occasion at Antioch. His whole views, his whole standing, with regard to Christianity, were different. He saw Christianity as the antagonist of Judaism, outwardly and in form. He was enabled to see how it rested upon the old foundations, and how it clearly fulfilled the promise of God; just as St. Peter was enabled to see it, in the power of the Spirit, but long before the Gentile question came in, in his first discourses, as we have abundantly had occasion to notice, to the children of Israel after

the day of Pentecost. But Paul saw it after the Gentile question came in. Notice his arguments with the Galatians; notice how he deals with that same Jewish argument of the Colossians, that they could supplement Christ with Judaism; he tells them that they cannot do it; that if they are circumcised, Jesus Christ will profit them nothing. Now all this, though owing to the inspiration to the Spirit of God, that higher influence which always accompanied St. Paul, is yet to be looked at in connection with that other instrumentality which always accompanied St. Paul, and from which he was not likely to mistake the gospel as being incorporated with the Jewish religion.

This person, then, our Lord chose for his purpose. And now let us fix our eyes for a moment upon the circumstances in which this person was found; because here, I take it, is an important point. After that, we will say something again of those capacities which were found in him for the work. Saul, we read, was the chief persecutor at the death of Stephen. Now it has been the custom very much, and particularly the custom in modern Germany, even among those who commonly receive the miraculous nature of the conversion of St. Paul, to say that the execution of Stephen had made a great and indelible impression upon him, and that the change of his mind began at that time, and that, when the Lord met with him on the way to Damascus, he was in fact already virtually converted to something like a reception of Jesus of Nazareth. But I may say at once, that there is not the slightest foundation for that in the sacred text. On the contrary, it would appear that his hostility had been rising ever since that time. Just listen to the words which we have before in the 8th chapter about him. "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison". And then to that point St. Luke, as is very much the custom with him when he is narrating a parenthetical circumstance which happened, goes back again in the first verse of this

chapter. "And Saul, yet breathing out"—it is not exactly, "breathing out"—"*ἐκπνέων*" is the word—it would rather be, "breathing", without the word "out", perhaps—the element which he breathed and on which he lived—"threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord". Surely there is no sign here of change of mind; there is no sign here of impression made upon him by the death of Stephen: it says the reverse. And the words which, you remember, occur in his apologetic speech, the words in his own speeches and his own epistles, shew that these very things dwelt on his memory. He was in the full fervor of his zeal against Jesus Christ. He "thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"; and those things he was doing.

And just let us guard against what I deem to be another error with regard to this remarkable person, in order that we may have a consistent view of his conversion, as we call it, and of his course afterwards. From the circumstance of the church of Christ always having used the words "The conversion of St. Paul" to signify this remarkable change which happened to him owing to the appearance of the Lord to him on his way to Damascus, it has been the practice in these latter days, now that the word "conversion" has taken a somewhat different meaning, to regard St. Paul as having been, in the common sense, an unconverted man before that time; that is, I mean, a worldly fleshly man, living in the sight of his own eyes, and not thinking of God in all his ways. Now I take it that this is a great mistake. It is a mistake which will tend very much to prevent our obtaining a consistent view of this whole matter. It is a mistake which will also cloud I think very much our understanding of a very difficult and important chapter, the 7th chapter of the epistle to the Romans. I am not about now at all to enter upon an exposition of that remarkable and difficult passage which is found in that chapter: but I will just say this; that he does there treat, most plainly and

distinctly, of a time when he was an unconverted man in the common ordinary sense. He tells us of a time when he was "alive without the law". There I suppose he means, by the whole context, that he seemed to himself to be prospering and going on very well, leaving the whole concerns of future prospects out of consideration, and without ever thinking of God's law in his life. God's law had not then become the law of his life; he did not see it in its spiritual sense; and he was just what we call a careless unconverted man. But then he speaks of a time when "the commandment came"; that is, I suppose, came home to him, as we say, by some circumstance or other, but totally unconnected with this which happened on the road to Damascus. The law of God was brought home to his heart; and he became what we call ordinarily a serious-minded man. He regarded God in his ways, whereas he did not regard Him before. And it was just in that zeal for God that we now find him: and you have, I think, no right whatever to say that Saul, at the time when he was the chief prosecutor of Stephen, or at the time when he went with these letters to Damascus, was what is commonly known as an unconverted man. There is a great fallacy very often built upon this; and that fallacy is, a comparison of the circumstances of us ordinary men with these circumstances. I have sometimes heard the comparison carried to considerable length, and enforced with considerable energy; and it has been said, You must be able to date the time of your conversion to God, because we have an example of this kind in the scripture. Now you *may* be able to date that time: God's Spirit works very multifariously on men; and I do not say you cannot do it: but this, I will say, has nothing to do with the matter; because this was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a conversion from carelessness and from sinful life to seriousness and to the fear of God, but it was a conversion from "zeal without knowledge" to "the truth as it is in Jesus Christ". He "did it ignorantly in unbelief", he tells us: but we are not bound

to interpret that word "unbelief" as general unbelief of all divine power. He did it in zeal; he "thought that he was doing God service" by doing it: and, as I said before, we have no right whatever to say that his life was an unconscientious life.

Now I will leave the details of this passage for our meeting next Sunday afternoon on the subject. But I will now just anticipate the fact: and we will go, for the few moments before our conclusion, into the capacities found in this man whom Christ so marvellously called to the work. As I said, he was trained up in that city of Tarsus. As soon as ever this great event had happened to him, and as soon as that retirement had been passed through in which it pleased God to keep him for a time, learning by direct revelation the elements of the gospel,—we find him setting out upon his missionary journeys over the Gentile world. He and his companion Barnabas were specially set apart by the Spirit, and laid hands on by the church, for their journey. And now trace his work, and what do you find? Everywhere he is capable of dealing both with the Jew and with the Gentile. He goes into the synagogues of the Jews; he pleads and convinces; pleads with them out of their scriptures, convinces them that Jesus is the Christ; many of *them* believe, the most part of them indeed contradict and reject. From them he goes to the Gentiles: We never find him, even humanly speaking, defective in any one element of connection with those Gentiles. He is able to stand on Mar's Hill at Athens and to speak to them in their own way of thought, with their own associations dealt with 'in a speech of admirable skill, not surpassed in the whole history of skill in speech in the world. He is able by this speech to convince many of them. And so he goes on through his whole course. We never find him on any occasion defective: so admirably did God choose at first, and empower throughout, the instrument which was to do his work.

I may mention one more circumstance which admirably fitted him for it, which I did not mention at the first, because I was anxious to deal with the spiritual elements only, the elements for doing the spiritual work; and that was this. Some persons sent out upon this work, equally qualified for it, might have been in continual peril of being tossed hither and thither at the hands of any arbitrary or unjust person who had power: whereas St. Paul, we know, was rescued on more than one occasion, and provided for, I dare say, ultimately on his coming to Rome, by the circumstance of his having the privileges of a Roman citizen. Here again was a great preparation of God of the man for his work. He not only endowed him with the knowledge of the Jew, the learning of the Greek, but also with the privileges of the Roman: and thus he was enabled to become the great messenger of the gospel for that church which, as has been most admirably said, stands at the confluence of the three great civilizations of the world. Each one of those civilizations brought down its stream; from the Jewish there came the stream of pure divine truth, from the Greek one the stream of human learning, from the Roman one the stream of civil privilege; and they all united in the person of this one man, who was to go forth and to "preach to those Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ".

Now I do think that this is a consideration of such interest, that I may well be excused for having taken up your time with it, this afternoon, in distinction from any direct treatment of the great narrative upon which we are about to enter. Look upon, brethren, and admire the wisdom and the love and the power of our blessed and exalted Saviour. See what He can do for his church; see what He has done; and shall we for one moment allow ourselves to be weak enough to distrust that power, to doubt that love, or to question that wisdom, in our own times? Is there any difficulty through which the church can be brought, one tenth

part so great as this difficulty, how she was to get beyond the narrow bounds of Judaism and to spread over the Gentile world? Can we conceive her ever placed in such a difficulty again? Yet look how the power and love and wisdom of the exalted Head of the church in a moment solved this difficulty, chose a man, not from those who were likely to be chosen, not from those upon whom human hopes would fix, but took him out of the very midst of the Jewish Sanhedrim, out of the midst of that council which had condemned the Lord to death, appeared to him from heaven, "plucked him as a brand from the burning", put a new spirit into him, and sent him forth on his work. And who knows, therefore, that at any time in the church of Christ, the very most perilous enemy, the very most hostile man that there is, may not be taken by the same power of our Lord and Saviour (for "his arm is not shortened" now any more than it was then) and placed in the very forefront of his people, and made to do his very greatest works? Well, then, let us "go on our way rejoicing". Let us in our own individual lives, as well as with our lips, as members of Christ's church, "know that he is the Lord", and "be still", not only from questioning and from rebellion, but be still also from anything like fear or doubt; because He both can and will bring about those circumstances, and put those persons to work for his cause, which He sees to be requisite for the welfare of his people, and for the carrying on of his work of salvation in the hearts of individuals as well as in the world.

Now in the light of what we have said to-day, or of thoughts something like what we have said, I would have you, before we meet next, read over and observe the circumstances of this conversion of St. Paul, and also refer to his own two accounts of it, which you will find in the references of your Bibles continually

referred to, and put together the narratives, and make them complete for yourselves: for we hope, on our next occasion, to enter thoroughly into the narrative, and to deal with those very superficial difficulties which arise from comparing the three different accounts together, and with the circumstances of the whole, as ordained by God, and carried out with reference to St. Paul himself.

HOMILY XVIII.

CHAPTER IX. 3.

Our subject last Sunday afternoon, you may remember, was the introduction to this wonderful event, the conversion of Saul, which we are about to read to day. In that introduction, we learned the remarkable preparations which God had been making for many centuries for the introduction of the Gentiles into His church; and, above all, we spoke of the preparation of the person, by whose instrumentality that work was to be effected. We will not now go over that ground again, further than to say, that we find him most singularly qualified by God's Providence for that work—being, so to speak, in his own person the representative both of the Old Testament learning of the Jews, and also of the literature and thoughts of the Greeks. We find that he was a man able to stand before the heathen, and to speak to them in their own ways of thought and language; and also to stand before the Jews, and argue with them out of their own scriptures, to prove that Jesus was the Christ. We find him also remarkably fortified, by his privileges as a Roman citizen, from injury and caprice at the hand of the enemies of the gospel.

We had occasion to notice (and that notice will be an introduction to this narrative), that he possessed singular advantages for comprehending and setting before those two classes the scheme of Christianity. His tone was distinct from the religion of the Jews, which consisted in outward

observance, and in relying upon rituals and ceremonies. He had been in practice as a Pharisee, regarding the religion of Christ as antagonistic to Judaism, and that very circumstance led him to apprehend more quickly, to carry out more entirely, and to defend more fervently the truth, that the religion of Jesus Christ was not dependent upon legal obedience, but was distinct from it; and that the key to it was faith in a crucified Redeemer. This person then, in the heat of Pharisaic zeal—not in the ordinary sense of the word (as I took care to remind you last Sunday) an unconverted man, not a wordly careless man; but a man believing that he was serving God conscientiously, while he was actively persecuting Christians—this person, in a state of unbelief in Christ, was on his road to Damascus, having letters to the synagogues, “that if he found any of this way” (namely the faith of Christ) “whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

We have two narratives from his own mouth of these incidents, and it will be our object to illustrate the portion of the narrative, which we shall take to day, from other places. He tells us in the 26th chapter, when he was confessing before king Agrippa, “I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them.” This circumstance shows that he was a member of the Sanhedrim or chief council, and consequently not less than thirty years old, at the time this incident happened. “And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme”—that is to say, compelled them to speak evil of Jesus of Nazareth—probably to declare him to be an impostor—“and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” That is his own account of this same matter. He then came near Damascus.

Now may we venture, before we go further, to look somewhat into the mind of this man, as far as data are furnished to us by the Scriptures; and try to realize to ourselves his thoughts and feelings at this moment. I said last Sunday that I did not at all believe that which has been so much propounded and received lately in Germany, that his mind was already changed with regard to Christianity before this time. We must take him to have been (I think the Scripture narrative absolutely requires it) in the full fervour of persecuting zeal. His mind was not changed; he was going as directly against Jesus of Nazareth as he ever was, or had gone before this time. But still this does not tell us all. A man may be in the full fervour of his zeal, and, at the same time, be under deep impressions of a very uncomfortable kind with regard to that which he is doing. Now I think there can be no question that the latter was the case with Saul of Tarsus. That he was not at all turned towards Jesus of Nazareth, is shown by the course which he was taking. But the impression made upon him by the dying speech of Stephen is too amply testified in the writings of his own epistles, and in his own speech in the Acts of the Apostles, to be left out of the question in a consideration of this kind. He was going on, it is true, in the fervour of his persecuting zeal. He had no intention of turning. He was not drawn towards Jesus of Nazareth. Still I think we may say without question, that he was not satisfied with the course he was taking. We may well believe that, having pointed out to himself this course, he was pursuing it with all his might. It was the nature of the man. How often we see that, when persons of a fervent disposition cast themselves into a certain course of action, anything which makes them uncomfortable in that course of action rather leads them to exaggerate it than to leave it off—that they show more fervour, as they are in their own minds less and less easy with regard to that which they are doing. Thus much I think it necessary to say. Owing,

as I have said, to the impression which, by his subsequent reproduction of its words and sentiments, we find that speech to have made upon him, it evidently did work within his mind, not in the natural direction in which might it have worked, to persuade, but in the direction of rendering him dissatisfied with himself. As I told you last Sunday, I cannot consent, with many able commentators, to hold that the great description in the Romans applies to this conversion. But I hold that we may apply some of the expressions in that description to similar states of mind to that which must have been in him at this particular time. Because, if we just carry on the thought which we entered upon with regard to this great message, we shall find that it must be supposed to apply to a time previous to his conversion—a time when he had been summoned, by the pangs of conscience arising from the working of the law within him, to the service of God. Now he describes that state of mind, you remember, by the expression “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And then he adds, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord”. So that we may venture to say that though this conversion was the law coming home to him, not at the date then spoken of—(as I firmly believe it was not), still the deliverance thus spoken of must be attributed to this time; because he could not have said “I thank God through Jesus Christ”, except at the time when he received the knowledge of Jesus Christ as his Lord, when he says “it pleased God to reveal his Son to me”. Taking these data, we have his state of mind, as little less than that of spiritual death. He was not happy. The law had come home to him, and he was working out the externals of that law as well as he could. He was zealous for that law; but he was not happy in the possession of the law, and in carrying it out.

In regard to another matter. He was going to Damascus. With what thoughts? He had, I dare say, before him at this time the names of several victims whom he intended

to lay hold of in that city, to bring them to prison and death for Christ. I think we are fully justified in saying that, considering the eminence given to him in the subsequent narrative, very likely there was one Ananias whom he had in his mind at this time, who was a man well reported of among those who followed the law and also among his brother believers in Christ. These things were working in his mind,—the nearness of that which he came to do, raising within him perhaps despondency and dissatisfaction with his present work, yet at the same time earnestness of purpose to carry it forward,—when, we are told, “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven”. Let us fill out the particulars of this, of which more details are not here given, from the other two narratives of his own, the one in the 22nd chapter, and the other in the 26th. In the 22nd chapter, “as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me”. Then in the 26th chapter we read: “At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.” So that we have this account. It was noon-day—the oriental sun was shining in all its splendour. It is quite out of the question, to take up the half-unbelieving view which has been propounded of the narrative, that it was a storm which overtook him. It could have been no such thing. A supernatural splendour appeared around him, above the brightness of that sun, which, by the account of all who have seen and travelled under it, is itself bright beyond all endurance. That light shone round about him and those who were travelling with him.

At this point there appears in the different parts of the narrative some discrepancy, or at all events something which looks like one. Let us take our narrative in the 9th chapter: “And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him.” In the 22nd chapter we read: “And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying unto me”. In the 26th chapter we

read: "I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying", thus we can fill and bring out the latter narrative, all who were with him fell to the earth. In one of the narratives, it would appear that the men who journeyed with him stood speechless. I mention these particulars because it is well that we should have a complete idea of the three narratives—of those things which have been attacked by unbelievers, and also endeavoured to be slurred over by believers—by the one as being differences fatal to the truth of the narrative, and by the other as being unwilling to think that there can be any difference in narrating the same thing in the scriptures. I believe both views to be wrong. We shall see some difference between the three narratives; but at present we are only concerned with this: "and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest". But "arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do". The words which here occur in our English text, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" are absent from almost all the ancient manuscripts, and must be rejected from this place. They were probably inserted from the other narratives, where they occur. In the 22nd chapter we read "And I said, what shall I do Lord?" In the 26th chapter we have, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks". You see, we have lost nothing by not reading the words in this place in the 9th chapter, because they occur in the other narratives. We are bound, with such evidence against them, not to read them here. "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest". "Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do". Then, filling that out from the other narratives, we take in the other words, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks". This is a proverb derived from the

universal practice in the East of driving oxen employed in agricultural operations with a goad, which was a long pole of wood shod with iron at the end. And just as it would be hard and impossible for an animal of that kind to continue kicking against that instrument, so it was with Saul. He was in the hands of one stronger than himself—of one who could by His providential arm urge him on where he would. It was totally in vain for him to struggle and wrestle against the power of Jesus, just as it would in the case of the animal to struggle against the goad.

With regard to the effect of these words upon Saul. As the narrative goes on (I will not state the full effect, but wait till we arrive at the conclusion, and then gather it up all at once), you see that Saul is at once persuaded, who it is that is speaking to him. That is plain, because he uses the word "Lord":—and "who art thou?" is not a question of interrogation; but a question rather of assurance, to make himself certain that this person, speaking from the glory in the heavens, was indeed that impostor—that despised one—that crucified one, whom he was persecuting. But we may also notice that the moment he is persuaded of this, he says: "What shall I do?"—"What wilt thou have me to do?" And we may trace in this at once the mind of a person (and this is what I urged last Sunday) not ignorant of God altogether, nor undesirous of obeying Him and his ways; but one who really was willing to tread in the way in which God would have him to walk, when it was pointed out to him. He states that in the 26th chapter, by saying, "Where upon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision". This is a more important point perhaps than some here present may be disposed to think, because the whole fabric of the doctrine of irresistible grace has been raised upon this narrative by no less a person than St. Augustine—that the grace which now was manifested and imparted from heaven did, contrary to his own will and his

own power, turn round the course of Saul, so that he had no choice his free will was coerced in the matter; and that he did not receive Jesus Christ of that will, but received him against that will. Now I do not hold that to be the scriptural account of the doctrine of conversion. The will of a man, feeble as it is, and nothing as it is, except by God's assisting grace, is yet called upon to co-operate with God's operations in the soul of man, just as it is with God's operations in the physical world for the good, for the sustenance, and for the health of the body. At the very time when the greatest supernatural operation which ever took place in our nature was about to be consummated, she who was the subject of it was said to have believed and inherited the blessings for that very reason: "Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord". So on this occasion I think we see the willing and ready mind of the astonished but persuaded Saul asking "What will thou have me to do?" and then going and setting himself to do it—not being "disobedient unto the heavenly vision". "And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do".

Now we come to a particular which it will be well to notice in the three narratives. "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man". In the 22nd chapter 9th verse we have: "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." In the 26th chapter, there is no allusion to their state, any farther than that they were all fallen to the earth. Now it would seem at first sight as if those two descriptions: "hearing a voice but seeing no man"; and, "they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me"; were at issue one with another. You may take the solution of this difficulty, if you like, in two ways. Some have it thus: "they heard a voice

and saw no man". The other says: "they saw the light but heard not the voice of him that spake". Undoubtedly both of these, if we choose to press them into exact accord, are capable of agreeing together. The one says "they saw the light"—and the other "they saw no man"—Saul saw the person of the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the vision, which they did not. Take the other side also: "they heard a voice"; or, as it may be well rendered, "a sound", the same word is commonly used for the two. "They heard a sound; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me". They may have heard "a sound"; but not the words which were uttered.

Now some light is thrown upon this latter interpretation (to which as you will see presently I do not altogether accede) by the remarkable narrative of St. John, in the 12th chapter of his gospel, when the voice came to our Lord. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered". Now there it seems as if the voice was heard, certainly by our Lord, and perhaps by his disciples, but not by the multitude standing round, though they heard a sound. That is something in favour of the interpretation I have referred to; but for my own part I acknowledge that that interpretation is too minute and hair-splitting. I do not think we are to judge of the language of scripture in that extremely subtle way, as if we were interpreting a legal document as to what a thing *may* mean. What we want to know with respect to scripture is what things *do* mean, and what they were intended to mean. I think it is within the limits of probability, and within the limits of perfect accuracy, in a minute narrative made at two different times, that minute particulars like these may at different times be differently represented. I regard the circumstance of those

two different representations being found in the same part of scripture, as a *greater proof* of accuracy, than any, similarity however carefully contrived and dovetailed and pieced together, and then put in to the same part of Scripture. I think the narrative shows that St. Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, did accurately set down that which he found and that which he heard. Either St. Paul gave him this account, or he found it in the records of the church at Jerusalem or somewhere. He put it down as he found it, carefully gathering up all things from the very first. He himself heard St. Paul make this speech recorded in the 22nd chapter; and there is every reason to believe that he translated it out of Hebrew into Greek. He tampered with nothing, but carefully preserved the words as they were uttered. The same is the case with regard to the 26th chapter. I ask, is not that carefulness, even where minute details might seem not to pass into one another, infinitely more evidence of the truth and perfect reliability of the sacred narrative than the most minute coincidence? Those who look for such minute coincidences, and stumble at not finding them, are in fact casting away great evidence to get the small. The faithful Christian deals with the spirit, and not with the letter. He is firmly convinced that the Lord did appear to St. Paul, and did commission him to go forth as his Apostle.

As we pass on we see that "Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man." He gives an explanation of this in the 11th verse of the 22nd chapter: "And when I could not see for the glory of that light"—the excessive splendour of that light—it dazzled his visual organs, and for a time deprived him of sight. This was the effect—he was led by the hand of them that were with him into Damascus. He was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink. I think it will be quite sufficient for us, though I had intended to go further, to dwell now upon an exceedingly important part of the subject before us, namely the probable effect upon the mind of Saul of that

which he saw and heard on this occasion; for it is a very important element in the subject upon which we entered last Sunday—the preparation of the man for his work. He had a personal commission from Christ. So had the rest of the Apostles. But there was this difference between them. The rest of the Apostles, as we found reason on several occasions to remark, were intended to work, and did work principally amongst the Jews. St. Paul worked amongst the Gentiles. Now when our Lord gave his commission to the rest of the Apostles, He himself was in a state of humiliation—He himself was a Jew. The commission was confined, or almost confined, except on that memorable occasion recorded in the first chapter of this book of Acts, to a commission amongst the Jews. At all events, from first to last, even including that commission in which our Lord spoke of Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, nothing was said to the Apostles respecting their work on Gentiles, which need imply more than that they were to work on Jews among the Gentiles, and in converting Gentiles through Judaism in the true sense. That they received the truth afterwards is not to our present concern. But now was a man to be raised up who was to be specially commissioned to preach to the Gentiles: for when the Lord is speaking to Ananias, in that which will form part of our next portion, he says: “he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”.

The personal commission furnished to Saul for his apostleship,—whence does it come, and how was it delivered? He received it from the Lord himself, who is now exalted God of heaven, and now become the personal Head of all mankind. Now, may we ask, what would be the effect of such a revelation upon the man himself? The commission was a perfectly general one: “Go thy way”. And as he gives it in the 26th chapter, summing up the words of Ananias together with the words of Christ—taking the spirit, and not the letter—he says that the Lord went on to say “But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this

purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me".

Now this commission the man himself never misunderstood. He never forgot, during the whole of his course, that he was sent to the Gentiles—that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, had given him this commission—that that divine person who had tabernacled in our nature, and was now risen up in that nature, and had all power given unto him, had commissioned him to preach all over the world, as far as his life and years went, the gospel of the universal riches of the grace of Christ. That was one effect. What was another? He was caught in the midst of his career of opposition to Christ. Well, there was an end for ever of self, and of all belonging to self. I suppose there never was a man in the whole course of history, in whom self was so completely annihilated as in St. Paul. I take it that this is the secret of that annihilation, and contains the whole account of it. He had, in the very midst of his self willed course, been met by our Lord, who struck him down, as it were, at once; and as far as that self was concerned, he never rose again. We may attribute to the circumstances of his conversion the entire abnegation of self which is manifested throughout all his epistles, and which forms one of the corner-stones, of the fabric of Christian doctrine which was raised by him.

Then there was yet another point. His whole conversion from first to last was due to the personal influence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well then, if self was nothing with him, Christ was his all and in all. Can you point out any set of Christian arguments, in which you will find the universal sufficiency of Christ so set forth as in the epistles of St. Paul?

Here again, I take it, another keystone of his doctrine is to be traced up to the events of this day. His Christian career was brought about by the Lord Himself. Christ as it were shone upon him, and, the power of that ray working in him, he set forth and laboured for life. The very first words Christ said: "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou ME?" contained in them a deep and wonderful truth constantly illustrated in the course of St. Paul's epistles; namely, the union of Christ with his church. What is it, but the body of Christ? What is it, but Christ himself? Is there any one who sets before us as St. Paul does, that all the members of Christ make up a body which is in a certain mystical sense Himself? When he, St. Paul, speaks of his own sufferings, he says he is filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ for his Body's sake. When speaking of the wickedness of taking our bodies and polluting them he says: "Know ye not, that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot?" There is no one who speaks with such full clearness upon the doctrine of the identity of Christ with his people, as St. Paul. Here again, what was the head of all that fountain of doctrine? "Why persecutest thou ME?" It was Christ Himself he was persecuting. In those few words, a truth was manifested to him, which he never lost sight of and never let go—that every member of Christ is united to and is, in a sense, part of Christ. We may trace, I think his "being dead with Christ," "buried and raised up" as part of this identification of the Saviour with his people. If we choose to follow the same considerations a little further yet,—his own state, after this vision, what was it? He was as it were dead for three days. He was buried in darkness. Then he rose again. He was told to arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling upon the name of Christ. Does not the whole process of this narrative remind us of the believer's soul being dead and buried and passing out through that

means to life, righteousness and holiness. So it has been well said that the words "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?" contain the germ and kernel of the whole epistles of St. Paul. So wonderfully does God work, when he means to bring about in a man that which, all unfolded, is before the eye of providence, but which, folded up and brought together in a moment, depends upon His word, and the working of that providence upon this particular man.

All those things I think we may fairly say belong to the preparation of this man. The matter has been by some pursued even farther than this; and, perhaps, it is not altogether passing into the realms of fancy to do so. You remember that there had been a man of the same name and tribe as the person we are dealing with, who had just like him pursued God's people from rock to rock—from desert place to desert place. That man was not influenced by the Spirit of God which had once influenced him, but driven by an evil spirit to the working out and rushing upon his own ruin, which finally overtook him. It has been thought that Saul, brought up continually in the traditions and the practice of his own nation, and with a knowledge of all the associations historically connected with it, may have perceived in these words, "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?" a repetition of that appeal which David made, when he asked the king of Israel of that name, why he persecuted and drove him about from rock to rock—from desert to desert. It may have been so. There was a great analogy of course between the one case and the other, up to a certain point; but from that point one took the upward and the other the downward road.

All these thoughts tend to confirm, and I think to impress still more upon us, the lesson of last Sunday. We were then speaking more upon the large scale. We were speaking of the great providential preparations of the minds of nations; and of the way in which the three great streams of civilization united in the church of Christ universally through the world; and of the way in which the man who was to set and mingle those

streams together, was prepared long before by various wonderful directions of God's providence. Now we speak of that same work of preparation within the human heart; and I turn to you and urge the same appeal that I did last Sunday, and say, Is there any reason to suppose that that same Saviour, who, in his infinite wisdom, power, and love, interposed on behalf of Saul, and plucked him as a brand from the burning, and worked in his heart so wonderfully with regard to that which was to be done by him spiritually as well as providentially in this matter—is there any reason to suppose that He is slumbering with regard to each one of us? He has a work for every one of us to do—He is as able and willing to enable us to work now as he was then. Why should we, in this course pointed out for us, hesitate, linger and distrust? Why should we limit our power? Why should we not believe that the Saviour, who could appear to Saul of Tarsus in the height of his fury against him, and could draw him so that he afterwards became his most eminent follower, will also take charge of all that belongs to us in our feeble, our undecided service of Him—that though we oppose Him not, yet still we are very often afraid that we are almost deserting Him, from the imperfection of our services, the weakness of our best resolutions, and the fickleness of our determinations at our strongest times? Let us not be discouraged. Let us hope on. Let us pray unto Him, as Saul prayed afterwards, and had comfort sent to him. Let us believe that the fountains of our heart are in His hands, as was the fountain of his heart; and that he can turn them as he willeth—that he can awaken our conscience and powerfully persuade us—that he is as alive to our best interests as we can be ourselves; that He who watched over his church and directed this remarkable person to take the lead of the church in her missionary efforts then, will equally watch over us now, and direct us into the course that pleaseth Him; and bring about those ends which may tend most to His glory and to our good.

From this moment we have no more concentrated persecution of the church of Christ by the Jews. The sting is taken out of Judaism; and though St. Paul was harassed to his latest day by the persecution of the Jews, here and there, wherever he went, we never have them united together against the church of Christ. They seem, in place of persecuting Jesus of Nazareth, to have concentrated their fury upon this one person, who, wherever he went, was the object of their hatred: and they desired to get him killed out of the way, as the principal preacher of the gospel of Christ. Here again is more comfort for us. Not only is a persecutor made into an Apostle; but the persecution itself is utterly scattered. And as in this principal and most dangerous, phase so it will be in every case. God has his own men in his own hand. However much the delinquencies of the church itself, or the machinations of foes may threaten danger he can at any moment, and will at the moment that seems good to Him, both for individuals and the church at large, not only divert that persecution and change the minds of those carrying it on; but also take all power from it and assert the power for Himself.

Everything is full of encouragement to us in the scripture narrative. Let us then both now, and at all times, go on our way rejoicing, for greater is He that is with us than they that are against us. He who keeps watch over us, neither slumbereth nor sleepeth—is all-powerful, and will vindicate his own promises and save his own people.

HOMILY XIX.

CHAPTER IX. 10-31.

You may remember that your attention last Sunday was directed to the circumstances of the wonderful conversion of St. Paul, as they are related to us in three different narratives; one of them in this chapter, and two given by himself in his apologetic speech in the subsequent part of this book. We need not recapitulate any thing which was then said, for those circumstances of themselves are familiar, I should hope, to us all. We now read that "there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias". It will be well that we should gather up the information which we possess concerning this person.

We first read that he was a "disciple"—that is to say, a Christian. Now in the 22nd chapter, we have St. Paul making his apology before a tumultuous assembly of the Jews; he being himself under the custody of soldiers, on the stairs of the Tower Antonia, speaking to the multitude below. There we find that he states this: "being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and said," as follows. There we find him set before us as being a devout man according to the law; and we may notice,—and perhaps it is a good lesson in Christian freedom and liberty of conscience,—I mean for those (and they are many among true Christian men) whose consciences are apt to be even

over-tender and scrupulous—we may notice the wisdom of St. Paul here: how he says that which it was wise and which it was judicious to say on the occasion, and does not say that which would at once have irritated the whole multitude to whom he was speaking, and rendered his further speech impossible. He says not a word about Ananias being a Christian disciple in his speech to the Jews. We may perhaps carry this hint a little further. In the 26th chapter he is again making an apology; but not this time before the Jewish multitude, but before king Agrippa, and the assembled nobility and judges of the city of Cæsarea. There he says in the narrative which we now read: “And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me”. In other words, he there puts into the mouth of our Lord, compendiously, the whole of what Ananias actually said to him of the real facts of the case, putting together that which our Lord commanded Ananias to say, as being said by Himself, in giving the narrative shortly and compendiously, so as not to enter into unnecessary details before the authorities to whom he was then speaking. Now all this need not offend any one of us. It was all strictly the truth. It was just the same kind of judicious way of speaking as when St. Paul, speaking to the assembly before him composed of Sadducees and Pharisees, shouted out, that he was brought to trial for the resurrection of the dead—that that was the point in question—and so divided his enemies among themselves. To return to our main point. We learn respecting Ananias, that he was not only a Christian

disciple, but he was a devout Jew, exceedingly well spoken of by all the Jews that dwelt there. So that he makes another link, and it was very proper that one forming such a link should be the introducer, between Jew and Christian—to the Gentiles who were to come in hereafter, of whom this very person, Saul of Tarsus, was to be the bringer in. To this disciple “said the Lord in a vision, Ananias” (of course it is needless to state that “the Lord” is our Lord Jesus Christ, wherever that title occurs) “And he said, Behold I am here Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight”. Modern travellers tell us that almost the principal street in Damascus to this day is a very long straight street; and that, very possibly, from the unalterable character for the most part of places in the east, is the very street here intended; “and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth”. We are not to suppose, I imagine, that Saul of Tarsus had never prayed before. We need not fall into the mistake respecting that which I mentioned to you before beginning to speak of this conversion, that it was to be treated as the conversion of a careless ungodly man—a wordly man ignorant of the faith and fear of God altogether. But considering who spoke these words, there can be I think but little doubt what is meant by them—that he was praying through the Son—approaching the Father as he never had done before, *praying*, in the full Christian sense of the word, and no longer now those prayers which, being made under the old covenant, had ceased to have efficacy—those prayers which were directed not through Him who had appeared as the only access to God; but he was praying in the name of Jesus, whom he knew now as his Lord and his God. And those prayers we know shall be answered. “Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name I will do it”. “Behold he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight”. The Lord had been pleased to grant him

for his comfort in this state of deep dejection a vision of the person who actually was to come afterwards, preparing him, and restoring to him his sight. "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem." This sentence is remarkable for being the first place where the words "thy holy ones"—"thy saints" occur. You know that the word "saint" is constantly used afterwards throughout the Acts of the Apostles, in the epistles of St. Paul and indeed of the other Apostles, but especially of St. Paul. It may be well, perhaps, as it is the first time that the word has occurred, just to make a few remarks about it. It is just simply "holy" and nothing else. We are accustomed to attach to the word a meaning which in its scriptural sense we ought not to attach to it, namely, as meaning some elevated kind of holiness above that of other believers. The usage of the church throughout the middle ages, and the usage now among ourselves in part, more especially in reference to the Apostles themselves and their cotemporaries, has been, to attach this word as a title only to those who are supereminent in the church; and this usage has somewhat confused our idea of what is meant by the word itself. The word is just simply this, one who is sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Every believer in Christ is a saint. All the churches of Christ are called by this name continually in this book, and in the epistles to which I have alluded. No one need shrink from this fact. If it is ever applied in derision by the world, it is the highest honor a Christian can bear to have it applied to him. Let him be worthy of it by his life. Let him be really and truly a saint, by being holy in life. There may be that in the derisive application of the word, which may teach us a lesson. There may be in its derisive application that which may point to something in us and our life, which is described, when these words are put into the mouth of a professor of religion in scripture, "Stand by, I am holier than thou". It is not for us to profess to be holy, but really to

be so: to deserve the title that henceforward belongs to the people of God in the scriptures.

"How much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name". This was a very natural rejoinder from Ananias. All that he knew of this person hitherto had been most contrary to anything which would seem to be answered by such message as this which he now received. It was something a like the occasion when you know Obadiah was sent to meet Ahab. He imagined it was a trap laid for him, that it was some way of getting him into trouble or temptation or difficulty, that Elijah was throwing him into Ahab's power, that the spirit of God would catch Elijah away and that Ahab would slay him. So it may have been with Ananias. He may have imagined that he was to be thrown into the power of this person as a punishment, and therefore he alleged this excuse. But the Lord had other reasons, and the facts were very different from those which this man supposed. Here is, I think, a little lesson for us Christians. We are very often in the course of our social intercourse with the world called upon to have connection with persons of whom we know nothing but evil. Many Christians may be led to shrink from such intercourse, and to say, I will not meet such persons. It is a too common practice among those who are very zealous for the cause of God to say, I will not hold conference with, and I will not go into the society of persons of this kind. How do you know that God may not have a message to deliver to them through you, and that he may not already have prepared their heart and inclined their ear to hearken? How do you know, that by withholding yourself from those unfortunate people (whether it is a clergyman from his brother clergyman, which is a too common case, or a christian layman from his fellow layman) you may not be dropping the very dignity which Christ means to put upon you; and refusing to do the work which he has for you to do.

"But the Lord said unto him Go thy way: for this man is a vessel of choice to me (a chosen vessel to me) to carry my name before Gentiles and Kings, and the children of Israel." You may remember perhaps the use which St. Paul makes of this same figure in that remarkable 9th chapter to the Romans. He says in the 20th verse: "Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" It is interesting to trace, as we did more at length last Sunday, the influence of the circumstances which now happened, and the words which were now used, on such a feeling and retentive mind as that of St. Paul. "He is a vessel of choice to me"—he reproduces the same expression in his own narrative) "to carry my name before the Gentiles,"—this stands first as being the primary purpose which the Lord had in calling St. Paul to his service,—“and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how many things it behoves him to suffer for my name's sake”. Now this is a remarkable saying of the Lord: "I will show him how great things he must suffer"—“he is vessel of my choice, because I will show him how many things he must suffer”. Is not this a thing to be remarked? Vessels of his choice are called especially to suffer. The dignity which Christ puts upon them is, to suffer with Him. You may be certain I have chosen him, because I will bring him through perils frequent, through deaths oft, through stripes in abundance. I will bring him through all those things related in that remarkable list of his own in the 11th chapter of the 2^d to Corinthians. When you see him a crushed down, suffering man—when you see his frame sinking, and the thorn in the

flesh overcoming him, you may be sure that he is a vessel of my especial choice. Therefore why should any of us, when we are called to suffer in bodily health, or to suffer disappointment of one kind or another for the service of Christ, imagine thereby that we are being put away by Him in dishonour? Rather let us take this encouragement to ourselves, which was here given as a reason from Christ's own lips.

"And Ananias went his way and entered into the house". The moment he knew the Lord's will, he, being a disciple and a learner from the Lord, went and did that will. No more cavils—no more excuses—he "went his way and entered into the house: and laying his hands upon him said, Brother Saul, the Lord hath sent me—that Jesus who appeared unto thee in the way by which thou wast coming hither, in order that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with his Holy Spirit". You see how instantly the Lord's voice changed this disciple's mind towards another. During such a narrative as this, busied as it is about another matter—a matter regarding the whole church and not a single individual, how full scripture is of individual lessons of profit for every one of us. His whole mind was changed. Would our minds have been so readily changed towards one whom we dreaded and hated, even if we had learned that he had become a disciple of Christ, and that there was an influence over him for the better? Would not our first thought have been—(I am afraid it would) a thought of suspicion and doubt—of endeavouring to make out that he had taken up that character from some other reason than from conviction? It is true, that we are not as certain as Ananias was of the facts in any case; but that should not enter too much as an element into the consideration. "Charity", as we read this morning in the epistle for the day, "covers a multitude of sins." Charity ought to lift us into something like certainty in every case of this kind, until we are positively and undeniably convinced to the contrary.

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales". That is to say, not only was the healing accomplished by these miraculous words, employed by the Lord himself, and spoken by his servant, but the visible token of it was given: the film which had been brought by weakness upon his eyes — by not being able to see on account of the brightness of that light — was suddenly removed: his eyes were opened: they were cleared and he looked up, or "received his sight," and having arisen he was baptized; and when he had taken food, he received strength. Now in the speech which is related as having been made to him by Ananias, in the 22nd chapter, part of which I read to you just now, he says: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord".

It has been often remarked, and well remarked, how much honor was, on this occasion, put upon the sacrament of baptism. Here was a man miraculously converted by Jesus himself — all the greater means used — his spirit wonderfully wrought upon — his very destination declared, and he himself, so to speak, set in the very way of his great duties; and yet Christ's own outward visible sign of admission into His church is not dispensed with. This leads us to say that there are in this matter two extremes which we ought all of us to avoid, just as they are always avoided in scripture. The one extreme is, putting the sacraments in the place of Christ; and the other is, neglecting them too much. We are ever, in matters of religious opinion, liable to oscillate from one extreme to another. And because the former of these is done, and lamentably done by some amongst us, it is no reason, although it is our temptation, why we should set aside, as I am afraid too many of us are disposed to do, Christ's own outward ordinances which he has commanded. He has commanded them for wise reasons. When they carry with them, as in the case of the faithful man they do, the full spiritual force of that which they

signify, then the very highest terms are used in the scriptures respecting them. We must not be afraid to use those terms likewise. Take for instance this very incident: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins". Now these words used to an unconverted man—to a worldly man—to a sinner by will and by habit, would be words unmeaning and untrue—because no outward baptism could wash away his sins - there must be that change of heart—that work of the Spirit applying the blood of the cross, without which all ordinances are utterly vain. But when a penitent man—one convinced of the truth of the cross, waits for the ordinance, then this expression may fairly be used of the ordinance, as it is here used by the authority of the Lord himself. There, I take it, is the distinction. When Scripture speaks all these high and holy things of baptism: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us"—words of faith and experience, and St. Paul says in the 6th chapter to the Romans, "so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death;" when these things are said, the full influence of the sacrament is meant—the outward and visible sign and the inward and spiritual grace joined; both of which are found in the faithful recipient of the ordinances of Christ. But these things which are spoken of in these places do not belong to the mere outward ordinance as administered promiscuously to all, but to the baptism by water and the Holy Spirit. He arose and was baptized, and was admitted as a disciple of Christ into his outward and visible church; as he had been admitted (and the admission was ratified by the outward ordinance) a disciple of his inward and spiritual church, by the power of God's Holy Spirit upon his heart.

"Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues" (the more probable reading is "Jesus" and not, "Christ"—for a reason I will tell you presently, "that he is the Son of God." He lost no

time: he did not wait, from mere motives of worldly prudence. There is such a thing as prudence in Christian practice, and it is a thing to be attended to; but it is very often made to do work which it was never intended to do; that is, to obstruct the zeal of a Christian man in the work of the Saviour, when that work is set straight before him. If St. Paul had listened to the mere dictates of worldly prudence, some would whisper to him, "Is it wise, so soon, when you know for what purpose you came here, to stand up and argue in favour of Him whose disciples you came here to destroy? Will you not diminish any influence you may have here after upon this work, and bring upon yourself the charge of fickleness, or deceit?" as indeed he did bring it in after days, however unworthily. The course of his life was changed; and he saw no reason why, being placed in the way, and the Lord having given him a message to go upon it, he should delay. He immediately rose up in the synagogues, and testified that Jesus was the Son of God. It is probable, I say, from the evidence which we possess from our ancient manuscripts, that the word is here "Jesus" and not "Christ"; and for this reason. In the first place, to preach that Christ was the Son of God, would hardly be necessary, because the Jews themselves had a belief very much approaching to that. By and by we have the same person whom he preached alluded to in the 22nd verse; "But Saul" "confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." He could not be said to prove that "Christ" was "the Christ." For all reasons, both external, and internal in the context, it was more probable that it was "Jesus"—the Jesus of Nazareth whom he came to persecute. His first assertion in the Synagogue was, that Jesus was not an impostor, not one whose name was to be wiped out of the world as infamous, but the Son of God.

"But all that heard him were amazed and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name

in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul was more and more strengthened." A remarkable word is here used which is never used in the New Testament except there or by St. Paul himself—the word *ἐνεδυναμοῦτο* was strengthened. This is an interesting point. We trace words continually in the Acts of the Apostles, which are often used in his epistles, but which are peculiar to himself. In the Acts they occur in narratives respecting himself, tracing the narratives probably to himself. At all events the thing intended by this word is even more important, for we learn from his own account, and a most important account it is, in the beginning of the epistle to the Galatians: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus". Now a moment after this we read that he "confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus". So that I suppose, and it has been generally supposed, that under these words "Saul grew more and more in strength" must be placed that visit to Arabia, which is not here positively mentioned. For another thing must appear by putting the narratives together, that it was during this visit to Arabia, meaning thereby, most probably, desert places more or less solitary, that Paul received from the mouth of the Lord himself that special revelation of the facts of the gospel, which we must I think suppose him to have received. In his epistles he states more than once that he received things from Christ himself. You may remember one instance in particular in the beginning of that grand resurrection chapter, the 15th of the 1st to the Corinthians, where he says: "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you", and so on: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received". And when

you put that together with his declaration in the 1st of the Galatians, that he received the gospel, not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised him from the dead, you cannot I think fail to conclude, that that reception was from Christ himself. He goes on in the Galatians to say "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ". And putting those things together, this was most probably, we may say indeed almost certainly, the occasion on which he received that revelation, and was thus enabled to speak authoritatively, as he did, respecting the institution of the holy communion: "I received of the Lord that which I also gave unto you". At this time, he was informed by Christ, either by vision, by revelation, or by personal appearance, of the things relating to his life in the flesh; his death upon the cross; his resurrection in glory; his ascending up into heaven, and all other things which it was necessary for him to know and teach as an Apostle. He grew then more in strength. If we refer this to what I have been mentioning, the word is full of interest. It brings to his hand strength and power which he could not himself have found. "And he confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, clearly proving"—putting together solidly, so that they could not confute him, such is the force of the word,—"that this is very Christ".

"And after that many days were fulfilled": If we want to know how many, we shall find in the continuation of that narrative in the Galatians, 1st chapter, 18th verse, he says: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter". So that you may put nearly that period for these "many days" here spoken of: three years from the time of his conversion. How much of this time was spent in Arabia, we cannot determine; but very much of it in Damascus, clearly. After saying that "he confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus", we learn "that many days were fulfilled", and it gives us this consummation; "after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill

him". They did not any longer suborn witnesses, as they did in Stephen's case, to say, "We have heard this man speak blasphemies against the temple and against the law;" but they had recourse, as Chrysostom says, to the *forcible syllogism*, and not to argument: they tried at once to kill him. That was their plan henceforth. They had forsaken argument; they were "confounded"—beaten out of it. In every place where he went from henceforward, we find his Jewish enemies ever ready to stir up the people to put him to death if he fell into their hands. Forty combined together binding themselves "under a curse that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul". Henceforth he is the object of all their enmity. "And they even watched the gates day and night to kill him".

I make no mention at the present moment—I just give this hint, for fear I should be considered to have forgotten and passed it over altogether, of what he says himself elsewhere; respecting the authority under which Damascus was at this time; as there is some difficulty about it. It does not belong to our present narrative.

"Then the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket. We learn from travellers to Damascus, that there are such windows there to this day. There is a print, in that interesting work, *The life of St. Paul*, by Conybeare and Howson, of windows in the wall of Damascus, through which this might have taken place, or might take place at this day. St. Paul refers to this circumstance afterwards in the 2nd to the Corinthians, 11th chapter, 32nd verse, in a remarkable way. There occurs the case I mentioned just now which I will not dwell upon; but he seems to take it as the one peril of his which deserved express mention in the midst of those which he masses together in a long catalogue. It seems as if it were the focus of the danger in which his life ever was, in his missionary journeys, and his duty as a disciple of Christ. And there

seems to be another spirit in which he mentions it. He says "The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not". In all this catalogue of my perils, strange as it may seem, I am telling the exact truth; and, as a proof of that, I will just tell you one thing—it seems as if that were the connection—I will mention one of my perils which brought me into the greatest danger; and brought me (so seems to run the connection) into the greatest ridicule. It may have been said by his adversaries that he was turning the world upside down, and yet at one time he had recourse to so contemptible a method of escape as that here related. But of this, or anything else he is ready to boast, for the sake of Christ and His word.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple". Natural enough that they should not, considering the course he had taken with regard to them; and considering how little we are disposed to believe things which occur out of our own immediate experience. Remember, we are always slow to believe, even in these days of rapid communication, that which takes place at a distance from us, until our eyes and ears are convinced. How much more so then, when there were very few communications. Considering that the Christian church had been by his persecution, most of them very likely driven from Jerusalem—scattered from thence—it is not unreasonable that they should not realise the fact that Saul had now become a servant of Christ instead of a persecutor.

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." Here again it is said that it „was in the name of Jesus” that he spoke. We have seen something respecting Barnabas

before. He was a native of the island of Cyprus. We were told that he brought the price of his land that he had sold and laid it at the feet of the disciples: and we shall hear much more of him hereafter. There is no improbability in supposing that he may have been a friend of St. Paul in his youth. Cyprus is a short distance from Cilicia—from Tarsus indeed it is visible, or from the coast immediately below that city; and it is likely enough that in the schools of Tarsus these two men may have formed their first friendship as Jews and students of the law, which afterwards they continued, in preaching the gospel of Christ, till it was cut short by that dispute which is related at the end of the 15th chapter. That friendship, we may well conceive, as would be natural with servants of Christ, was knit up again, and is now consummated in glory.

Barnabas then came and introduced him to the Apostles. We know who those Apostles were, from his narrative in the epistle to the Galatians. "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter". Peter was at this time the chief of the Apostles, and his object in going to see him most likely was, to prove his mission to him. He saw him there. "But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother". Those two only he saw at that time. Then on a subsequent occasion he speaks of Peter, James, and John; and it is probable that he never saw in the flesh any of the Twelve, except those; unless he saw them as a persecutor before his conversion. After his conversion, those were all he had seen and taken counsel with; so separate was he, in all that Christ intended him to do, from those who were called to be with the Saviour during his trials on earth.

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians." You must not suppose these to be Gentiles. They are those Grecian Jews, of whom I have spoken so much before, and whom it is

most important to distinguish from Gentiles. At this time the Gentiles, as such, had no place in the church of Christ. It was these very Grecian Jews who had stirred up the persecution against Stephen, and of whom, within the church, a certain number were specified as Deacons. The appointment of Deacons seems to have begun with the murmurings of the Jewish portion of them, with whom Saul was disputing at the beginning of his message to Jew and Gentile; but they endeavoured to kill him. They were affected with this Jewish spirit of no longer entertaining the message respecting Jesus of Nazareth, but endeavouring to put out of the way him who delivered it. "But the brethren having knowledge of it brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." It would seem, that on this journey he came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. He was not idle on that journey. He preached through Syria. He was probably sent off by sea—so the words seem to imply; and he went through Syria into Cilicia, which lies to the north-west of Syria round that corner; and he preached the Gospel as he went.

Then comes the sequel to this portion which we have to day before us. "The churches," (or as it is in the text of the original, "The church), had rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied," or rather perhaps, "were edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and abounded more and more in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." God had been pleased to snatch away the lion that was harassing these churches, and to turn him to a lamb. He was sent away now for the Lord to point out his work for him to do; remaining in his native city, Tarsus, preparing for his missionary labours. During that time the churches, if we take that reading, or the church—it will mean much the same ("the church" is but a collection of churches), it would seem that there was more than one—no longer only the church at Jerusalem; the other churches had rest—they were built

up in their most holy faith, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Here was another season of rest. The history of the church, like the history of the world, is, for the most part, a history of disputes and troubles. We see nothing of those seasons of repose, during which a nation makes sure advances towards prosperity and civilization. In like manner, we see nothing of those periods of repose during which the church of Christ walks in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; but we must supply them. We must not suppose that Christ forsakes his promise of joy and peace in believing; although at the same time he shows his people collectively, as well as individually, what they must suffer for his name.

Now from this time, where our portion ends, the narrative passes away from St. Paul to St. Peter. We have a long passage, as far as the middle of the 12th chapter, where he is made again an actor in introducing multitudes of Gentiles, as he had done multitudes of Jews, into the church of Christ. We lose sight of him there, and from that time more or less, to the end, the Book is occupied with the sayings and doings, in the power of the Spirit of the Lord, of this remarkable person, of whom we have been to day conversing. It is my hope that we may be enabled to complete that, the next portion respecting the introduction of the Gentiles into the church of Christ; thus placing the church of Christ in the narrative upon its present footing, as a church where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

HOMILY XX.

CHAPTER IX. §2 — X. 23.

Let me remind you where we stand in the history of the church. We have just passed the wonderful conversion of Saul of Tarsus, by which the greatest and most prominent enemy of the church of Christ is now laid aside, and reserved in store to carry his name "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." We were told in the last verse of the portion which we expounded, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied". Now this verse forms, more properly speaking, the transition to that passage which we shall to day read, the end of the 9th chapter. We pass by means of it from Saul of Tarsus to the Jewish church once more; and by means of that passage the way is prepared for the receiving in of the first fruits of the Gentile church. We have seen already how the bonds which bound the church to the holy city had been by degrees lessened. The persecution which arose about Stephen had driven away from Jerusalem all but the Apostles. Since that time the enmity of the Jews had been going forward—we shall soon learn in the 12th chapter how that one of the Apostles themselves is put to death by martyrdom for the faith; and how that another, namely St. Peter, was imprisoned, and it was proposed to put him to death, had he not been miraculously delivered. Now all

these things pointed to the final rejection of the gospel, as we have before showed you, by the Jewish people: and God in consequence was preparing, for His time was come, (not I mean in consequence merely of the rejection of the gospel by the Jews) the way for the Gentile church. But you may notice, and this especially is prominent in the epistle to the Romans, how Jew and Gentile seemed to alternate—oscillate, as it were, in the declaration of God's doings and mercies with regard to mankind. Whenever, in that epistle to the Romans, St. Paul has depreciated the Jew—showed that his covenant advantages were nothing, being rejected as they were, and being set aside by him spiritually;—after he has for a time shown that, and uplifted, so to speak, the Gentile at the expense of the Jew, he as it were holds his hand, and again shows the advantages which the Jew possessed, and uplifts him for a while at the expense of the Gentile. It was not God's practice to favour persons. He dealt with broad, free revelation of great promises of mercy and grace in redemption with regard to mankind. We shall read to day from the 31st to the 35th verse and from the 36th to the end, and we shall find two notable instances of the grace of God, and the power of the spirit of Christ, in the Jewish church. I take it that they are related for the reason that I have alluded to. We are about to forsake the Jewish church almost for good in this history. Once or twice we are brought to Jerusalem and we hear of the church; but for the future the missionary church will be Gentile. Then are we to conclude that God has forsaken His people? Are we to hold that the power of Christ, and the power of the Spirit, and the life and conduct of faith, are no more to be found within the limits of the Jewish people? Very far from it. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified." I do not hold because those of the Jews who rejected Christ put themselves out of his mercy, that thereby that arm of his was shortened towards those who

believed in Him: we find that those churches went on and were multiplied—His work went on hidden among them, leavening the mass of the people notwithstanding their rejection of Him. Now what is the lesson that we may learn from this with regard to our own matters both in history and in our own experience? Very often indeed those broad letters in which God's dealings are written upon history, and written upon our lives, are by no means the only record that God is working where we see Him not. If we could but follow out the internal history of the Jewish church during this national rejection, while the Gentile church was going on and multiplying, we should find far more chapters of God's mercy and grace to individuals and to families than we could possibly read during the course allotted to it on these pages. Some of those instances are given just as a specimen, just as much as to say, you are not to think, because the Church is about to migrate to the Gentiles, that therefore God has rejected the believing Jews. Far otherwise. It is to be doubted whether there ever was so complete a figure of the church of Christ—so complete an example put forward in its whole history, as during that short time of its sojourning among the Jewish people in Jerusalem. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." There has not been such a time since. The Jew had an undoubted advantage. When the Gentile turned to the faith, he was beset with the images of his idolatry, and surrounded by the practices of society about him: there were a thousand hindrances standing in his way. Most of those habits, practices, and associations, with the Jew were totally different. He had, so to speak, an inward impulse in the way of the faith of Christ, and the practice of the will of God, of which even the best Gentile, the man who had lived the purest life, and undergone the best moral preparation for the Gospel, knew nothing. Therefore the advantage of the Jew was evident; and, I believe we may almost say in our time and in these later days would

be evident still in this particular—not that there is now any distinction between Jew and Gentile—but those who had been deeply studying the law of God, and had been brought up from their youth in the covenants and practices of their fathers, would have somewhat an advantage, counterbalanced perhaps by other disadvantages, in the reception and belief of the Gospel when it did come.

“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.” The action is at once transferred back again from Saul of Tarsus to Peter. Peter was, in the early part of this book of the Acts, divinely constituted the pre-eminent person in the church of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, we know from his own testimony in the 16th chapter of Matthew, had committed to him, in the course of his overruling Providence, the keys of the church at this early period. It was he who was empowered to receive all those Jews into the church on the day of Pentecost. It is he again who is about to be empowered to receive the Gentiles into the church, in this chapter which we shall begin to-day. After that, he is no more pre-eminent in his work—after that, he retires back, and Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles occupies the prominent place. Henceforward the idea of any primacy on the part of Peter is a mere fiction. There is no appearance of it in Scripture, or in the declaration of our Lord himself, or in the history which follows, which is the best comment upon that declaration. He is, so to speak, the centre of Jewish Christianity. He was passing “throughout all *quarters*”—we supply here the word “*quarters*”—but it would have been perhaps better to say “as Peter passed through them all”, namely the Jewish believers, taking a review of them, making a sort of solemn apostolic visitation of the Jewish churches, “as he passed throughout them all, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.” Now the portion of country to which we are here introduced, was one never in good savour in old Testament history. It was a sort of

mixed country of Jew and Philistine, never thoroughly subjugated by the tribe of Judah, to which it territorially belonged; and this part of the country is taken as a sort of specimen, leading us to suppose that it was, as the Jewish church had been, favoured by the grace and power of Christ.

"And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise and make thy bed. And he arose immediately." The simplicity of the narrative seems to show how very near at hand the power of the Lord was in that part of the Jewish Church; and how obvious a matter it seemed to raise a man in this way from a sick bed. "And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord." Here we have then the grace of Christ abundantly poured out on two whole towns, or rather, one town, for Saron was not, we may suppose, a town, but the plain of that name so frequently spoken of in the old Testament. The town of Lydda and the territory surrounding it were converted to Christianity.

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up, and when

he had called the saints and widows presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner." Here is another instance of the power of Christ and belief in that power; the saints sending immediately upon the death of this valued and charitable woman, and the way in which the power of Christ was manifested in raising her to life by the hand of the Apostle; so that we are not by any means justified, very far from it, in supposing that the Lord was indifferent to the Jewish church, although his special favour in the manifestation and spread of the Gospel was about to be transferred elsewhere.

Now we are come to the crisis. St. Peter was passing many days in Joppa:—and not far from Joppa, God was preparing the way for the first fruits of the Gentiles to be received into the church. Now let me put you in mind of what a knot there was here to be cut. The Gentiles and the Jews had hitherto been related in this manner. Many were the favours which the Jew had received from the Gentile. The elevation of the Jews to favour during their sojourn in Egypt was owing to Joseph being taken in by the Gentiles, and being a popular person among them. Their great inspired lawgiver Moses was brought up in the wisdom of Egypt. A Gentile woman was taken into the hallowed line from which our Lord descended. In another instance Cyrus, a Gentile, was the means of restoring the Jewish church after its captivity. In many instances the Jews have been deeply beholden to the Gentiles but in one thing there was no such being beholden—that was with regard to the oracles of God, and the covenants of God. There the Gentile must become a Jew—that was the only way revealed as yet by which a Gentile could have access to God. The Jew could conceive of no other way. It was as intelligible, as I have illustrated to you before, that the Gentile should be at once the recipient of God's promises and his favour, as it would be to say that

an inferior race of animals should be the recipients. Now the Jewish churches were walking in the faith and fear of the Lord. This is especially mentioned, and mentioned among other reasons for this. We are prepared to hear that whatever the Lord does and manifests to them they will accede to. Here was a knot worthy the interference of a divine miracle. By no persuasion could the Jew be induced to believe that the Gentile could be received on a level with himself to the gifts of the Spirit. God was then preparing the way; and we have a chapter full of miraculous incidents at which the unbeliever stumbles, but which the believer is prepared to find. For he sees that there is no other way out of the enigma in which the church finds herself, but a divine interference of this kind. How was it brought about? "There was a certain man in Cæsarea". Cæsarea was the seat of government in Judea, and the residence of the Roman procurator—he only went up from there to Jerusalem on occasions of great festivals, and occasions demanding his presence. This is an important point. "There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band". You will observe how God takes a person from the very centre of Gentile dominion—a Gentile subject. Of all the empires of the world, the Roman empire was the last in prophetic order, and the most powerful—that which should grind all others to pieces and break them. It was the most secular of all others. The rest of the empires had followed something in the way of religion—false religion: but the Roman empire regarded all religions politically as alike—any religion which belonged to a conquered people might become a *religio licita*, a licensed religion. The Jewish religion was under that protection. It was purely a secular Gentile power. And where shall we look for the centre of that power—for the purest form of the man who lives under a secular Gentile rule, embodying and personifying it so to speak? Clearly in the army of Rome, where the man here mentioned held the highest place among those who would be called in our own army non-commissioned officers. Sprung

from the ranks, he was one who by his own good conduct, regularity, or bravery, had come to be entrusted with the oversight of 100 men. He was a centurion; and it was to the centurion that the army looked in almost all difficult cases for its power—its principal strength, as the ruling guiding spirit of the private soldiers. There could not be an officer possibly selected, which should embody the secular Roman power better, than the centurion of the Roman army. He was the staff and embodiment of that power—one who had grown up in it, who carried it about in himself, and represented it. Such a man dwelt at the seat of the Roman government in Judea—he was a centurion of the Italian band. Everything is of consequence: he was not a denizen of Judea—not one who sprang from there, and had been appointed into the ranks of the Roman army—he belonged to a band which sprang from Italy, the cradle of the strength of the Roman empire. He was a “devout man, and one that feared God with all his house,—which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always”. What an exceeding depth of interest there is about this notice! The fear of God had actually penetrated into the very centre—ripened in the very core, so to speak, of the Roman empire. He was a man in the very centre—than whom none can be a better representative and embodiment of the Roman empire, a devout man, and one that gave much alms to the poor. It would certainly appear that the preparation was ripe—that the power of God’s Spirit, in that small measure in which it was given to the ignorant Gentile world had been working and preparing it for the great things that were to go forth. “He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day” (the Jewish hour of prayer—we must conceive him to have learned the faith of God in Judea, and to have attached himself to Jewish customs, but not a recipient of faith in the proper sense of the word) “an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid and said, What is it, Lord?” We learn

respecting this from his own account, which he gives afterwards to St. Peter. There he says "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold a man stood before me in bright clothing." There was some reason or other, why he was dedicating that day expressly and solemnly to the worship of God. Some have supposed, and it is by no means an unlikely supposition, not unlikely, because belonging so completely to the circumstances under which we find this revelation made, that he may have been seeking, in doubt of the issue, a solution before God of the state in which the Gentile world, and himself as belonging to it, were to be, in regard to the great things belonging to the gospel. We know that Philip the evangelist was dwelling in Cæsarea, and we cannot suppose that he had been idle after he had reached his home in Cæsarea. We may suppose that the gospel of Christ was well known there; we know that it was, because when Peter comes to Cornelius, he says "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) that word I say ye know". He deals with it as a familiar thing. Therefore it is by no means an unlikely supposition, that Cornelius's fasting and prayer may have referred to this very matter. He was seeking in his inward soul the guidance of God about this weighty point, respecting which both churches and believers among the Jews, and those who were devout men waiting upon God among the Gentiles, were expecting such a solution. An angel of God appeared unto him, and said, "Cornelius. And when he looked on him he was afraid, and said, What is it Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God". Let us hide no portion of God's eternal truth. I think the tendency of the present day is to conceal the testimony which such words as these give to the fact, that a life of the kind which Cornelius was leading does, in God's sight, find the favour which is here spoken of by this angel.

That no man can, by his own merits, or by anything belonging to himself, find favour with God, or attain unto salvation, is a sacred and immovable truth for us Christians. That no work or labour of love done in the Lord's name, however imperfectly, as in the case of Cornelius, under however mistaken an impression with regard to God's will and ways, shall pass unnoticed by Him, is a truth equally sacred and unmovable. Let us then cultivate Christian wisdom, that we may be able to apply the two whenever they come before us, in our own case, or in that of others.

"And now send men to Joppa and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner whose house is by the sea side; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." Now you will notice, that Cornelius is not directed to send for Philip the Evangelist, who was dwelling in the same town with him. May we not venture to say that, just as it pleased the Lord to take out from the very centre of the Roman Empire, as I have been showing you, one who, from his position in the Roman army, embodied the secular power of Rome,—so he was pleased that the man should be admitted into the Christian church, not by any subordinate minister of that church, nor indeed by any ordinary member of the apostolic college, but by the very person who at that time constituted the centre of Jewish Christianity. That there might be no mistake about this very important matter, the chief of the Apostles was to receive this man who represented the Gentile world into the church. This, I take it, we may well say was the reason why he was directed to send for Peter. "He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." Simple words of guidance—words, which are always ready for us, if we will consult those whom God points out—his word, or his ministers, or those who may teach us what we ought to do.

"And when the angel which spake to Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a

devout soldier of them that waited on him continually." So that the man was not alone in his devotion to God; nor will any one be alone whether in the midst of the Roman army, or in the midst of a Christian city, when any man is devout, and one that fears God and prays to God alway: he will act as leaven to those around him. There were, among the unpromising ranks of coarse Roman soldiers, those who were attached to God's service by his means. How interesting a picture does this present to us! In the soldiers of that heathen army, there were bright spots, like this man who feared God, and had those about him who feared God. "And when he had declared all those things unto them, he sent them to Joppa." Doubtless they, as well as he, were deeply interested in the issue of this important and solemn matter.

Now we pass from Cesarea, and from the Gentile Centurion, to the Apostle. "On the morrow as they went on their journey and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour." About the hour of noon, little conceiving doubtless what was in store for him, and what a light was about to be poured upon all things henceforward, which had never yet dawned upon the church of Christ: still God had them in view, and he had his messenger in view, and he was bringing them together. "And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready he fell into a trance" (it was the hour of the principal meal of the day—the hour of noon) "and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise Peter; kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so Lord: for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice; and the vessel was re-

ceived up again into heaven." Let us enquire among ourselves, what did this mean? Was it a mere illustration of the fact that henceforward God was willing to extend his favour to the Gentiles, and that the Gentiles were no longer in his sight unclean, as they had been, or did it contain in itself the root and reason of the fact? Was it the greater, and the admission of the Gentiles the less, or *vice versa*? Decidedly, I think, it was the greater fact. Let us see how this was. Creation, under the old-testament dispensation, caught the curse of man. Man was the Lord of creation: man fell, and creation was cursed. Creation under the old testament was unclean. Certain animals were excepted from that uncleanness, and were allowed under the Levitical dispensation to be partaken of to satisfy the necessities of the human body; but the rest remained unclean as they were before. It was not that all creation was clean, and certain portions of it were set aside as unclean; but it was that the rule was uncleanness, and the exception was cleanness. What had taken place by the birth of Christ? The birth of Christ in humanity had glorified that humanity, and set that humanity joined to his own Divine person, at the right hand of God, pure and accepted. That humanity was just as much the Lord of creation, as it was before the fall. Man never lost his lordship, but he involved creation in his ruin. Now that ruin is repaired by the Lord Jesus Christ. Creation has become clean to believers in Christ, and not unclean. "I believe," said St. Paul, "that there is nothing unclean in itself, but it is unclean to him who regardeth it as unclean." It was this fact that was represented to St. Peter. The fact was represented to him, which involved, as a consequence, the admission of the Gentiles into the church, namely, that all creation was purified by the act of God in Christ. "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." There were all sorts in this sheet that was let down: all sorts of animals, clean and unclean, which were asserted as a matter of fact to be cleansed by God. "What God

hath cleansed"—I do not see how you can escape that as a matter of fact, I do not see how it can be said that these words applied only to the interpretation, when St. Peter knew nothing about the interpretation. It was a fact. He was commanded to slay and eat of what he regarded unclean. "Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold the men, which were sent from Cornelius, had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the spirit said unto him," Observe how the hand of God is in the detail of all this matter. He conjectures what it should mean, but it was a matter for which man had no solution ready at the time—"the spirit said unto him, Behold three men seek thee. Arise therefore and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." St. Peter would not have gone with them without this command, because he would not enter into fellowship with men of this description, nor have any converse or society with them before, as he himself declares. "Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews (Here was another link not before related. God had prepared this good report to smooth the way for the admission of the Gentiles by the Jewish believers) was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him," taken most probably as witnesses, for we are not to suppose that Peter did not know what was about to be done. The whole church was waiting at this time for a revelation on this point, and doubtless they knew that the

revelation was come. In what form they were ignorant, but they suspected thus much evidently. "And the morrow after they entered into Cesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." We will not enter upon the interview which took place in Cornelius' house, and the important speech which Peter made in the power of the Spirit, for it is far too full of meaning for us to day to attempt to expound. It will bring before us the solution of this difficulty met by the hand of God himself, just as we have seen the way to its solution prepared to-day. And we bring to an end as regards our regular ministration this our exposition of the acts of the Apostles, with the admission of the Gentiles into the church of Christ. I cannot say but I hope that we may be able to continue them occasionally, as opportunity may serve: at all events, it will be a point where we may very well break off, because it is the greatest break in the whole of this book of Acts. It is the point at which the church stands, having left its Jewish character, and first assumed its universal character, in Christ Jesus there being "neither Jew nor Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all."

The obvious lessons for our private belief and practice to be deduced from what I have gone through to day, I need not stay to impress upon you. They may be summed up in a very few words. The way in which God is actively and minutely superintending every difficulty in the way of his church. You see how grave and difficult the points are. Here was one, and it was utterly desperate; it seemed, that man should ever get over it. God himself, upon this being the case, interferes with his own voice, and his own hand, and solves the difficulty. Now although we have not reason to expect, in these days of ordinary means of grace, such direct and personal interference, we have every reason to expect, and we do most firmly believe, that where there is any difficulty in the way of the individual Christian, Family, or Church, which surpasses

human means to solve, there God is present, there God will be present, and there a solution will be brought about. We have every right, speaking humbly and faithfully in Christ, to know, and to trust, that such interferences for us will take place whenever they are needed, so that we may go on our way rejoicing. If this difficulty proved not too much for God or His Church, surely none of these minor points, upon which we are such poor judges, need for a moment discourage us, or cause us to faint on the way. Such thoughts as these are perhaps natural with every congregation, at a time when they may be losing their ordinary ministrations and means of grace, with an uncertainty as to what is to follow. The whole church was God's peculiar care at this time, and of course you will be his care at a time when you require it. You need not fear, whatever may happen, that His grace or Spirit will be in any measure withdrawn from you. He has, thanks to his Name, thousands of witnesses among the ministers of his Gospel. He can provide you, and He will provide you, with that which will be best for your spiritual instruction, and for your going on in the faith.

HOMILY XXI.

CHAPTER X. 24 to the end.

We are in the midst of that notable event, the preparation for the entrance of the Gentiles into the church of God. That had been brought about, you remember,—as indeed we see there was abundant necessity for it to be brought about,—by Divine interference. It never would have entered into the mind of the Apostle, without such interference, that the Gentiles were, as Gentiles, to be admitted into the church. Even with that interference, they were long as a body in receiving the idea thoroughly; but the principal of the Apostles at this time, St. Peter, having been informed by a heavenly vision that creation and mankind were no longer to be accounted unclean, but God had by the sacrifice of Christ purified all things for himself, and regarded them all as accepted in Him. And the meaning of this vision was cleared up to him, partly at least, by the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius the heathen Centurion, who having been attracted by the true religion as seen among the Jewish people to the worship of the true God, had also been commanded by an angel to send for the Apostle; so that the preparation had been going on on both sides. “And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after, they entered into Cesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.” Now let us just realize in our minds what this meeting was. I dwelt

for sometime last Sunday on the position of Cornelius as being remarkable, especially from the circumstance that he belonged to that Roman empire, which more than any other had crushed and broken down all the empires of the earth, and stood as the sole and undoubted representative of earthly power. He belonged to the army of the Roman empire, which was the instrument of that power. In that army, he belonged to the class which was the one of all others that upheld the discipline, preserved the character, and kept up the influence of the army. He was, so to speak, taken from the very centre of Gentile life, and as a fair representative of Gentile influence will be unequalled. Peter himself was the centre of Jewish Christianity at this time. He had taken the lead; and that lead had been prepared and intended for him in the outset and infancy of our church by our Lord himself. We have the two met together—we have the Gentile and the Jew—a Jew in the fullest sense of the word, for no man is truly a Jew who is not a Christian. Christ is the end of the law; and the Jew who stops short of Christ, as did those who rejected him and remained in Jerusalem, in their own wisdom, is not, properly speaking, a Jew. So that we have the centre of Judaism, and the centre of Gentile life, brought together, and about to be cemented, in Christ. What is the first incident that happens at this remarkable interview? “And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.” Now this likewise is a remarkable circumstance. If we take the genius of heathenism in general, there would not be much to be surprised at in Cornelius falling down at the feet of one, whom he had been commanded by heaven to send for to teach him in sacred things; for we trace in the writings and expectations of the Gentile world a very general feeling that one would come to teach them things which they knew not. However, we need not look so far for the history of the incident, or the cause. During the lifetime of Cornelius, the practice of paying divine honours

among men had sprung up and reached its height. If he were of the age of 40 or 45, from his position in the army he must have remembered the very first time there was a demand for divine honors to be paid to that remarkable man who came at last to be called Emperor or Emperor. The practice of paying divine honors to men, shocking as it seems to our feeling, was common enough at this time: and Cornelius showed his Gentile tendency; he had not got rid of that. He served God, and feared God; but he was not weaned from the errors of Gentile teaching. Peter at once repudiates, and it is most instructive as connected with the subsequent history of the professing Christian church, any such stealing of honor from God and rendering it to man. He said "Stand up: I myself also am a man." In these words we may trace not only repudiation of the honour sought to be paid him, to which of course he would be naturally averse as a Christian; but we may trace also the first teaching of that lesson which he had just received. Had it been the day before, he doubtless would have repudiated divine honour just as he did now. It was as abhorrent to the mind of a Jew—as it could be to the mind of a Christian. He was a Christian Jew long before this. But he might not thus have spoken, "I also am a man." That lesson of the common humanity of himself and the Gentile, one which the Jew was so slow to learn, he had been taught by revelation from heaven; and this was his first expression of it; "I am come here in the fulness of our common humanity to learn what God has to teach us, I am now no longer of a race favoured and raised exclusively above you: we are all one together."

"And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together." Cornelius, expecting doubtless, as we found reason to think last Sunday, something like what was about to happen, called together his neighbours and friends to receive the great message of instruction, teaching him and them what they were to do. "And he

said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation." Now those who cavil at the diction of Scripture say, How can this have been asserted by St. Peter, when we know very well that the Pharisees were constantly going about for the purpose of gaining proselytes? Our Lord charges them with compassing sea and land to make one proselyte. They must therefore have associated with men of other religions and other nations. The answer to that is exceedingly simple. Associating with persons in order to make proselytes, is a different thing from associating in the way of friendship, and taking meals, which is thought so much of in the East,—or in the way of association, in the common, ordinary sense of the word. Associating with others in the way of making a proselyte, was a common case; but Peter clearly alludes to the general practice, and he had been himself a strict Jew. We know, not only from the writings of Jews, but from the writings of Roman Satirists, that it was the practice of the Jews not to show the way except to those of the same religion—to carry about with them baskets of provisions, and to cook their own provisions when in Gentile countries, for fear of pollution, when in association with Gentiles. To that practice, however it may have been infringed, for particular reasons, Peter clearly alludes. "But God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." How God had showed him, we know well, by that remarkable vision which we endeavoured to enter into at some length, and to explain the meaning of on our last meeting.

"Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask you therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" It would appear that the Apostle's eyes had not as yet been opened to the full meaning of this interview which he was commanded to seek. He had indeed been shown that he was to go and associate with Cornelius and his friends; that the vision evidently set forth

to him, and the Spirit commanded him afterwards; but for what purpose, he does not appear as yet to have ascertained. Cornelius now proceeds to tell him. "And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold a man stood before me in bright clothing; and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God." (all these incidents we went over on the last occasion) "Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side; who when he cometh shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Now does not it strike one, as one reads just this simple speech of the Gentile Cornelius, that there is a remarkable prophesy in the old Testament, "The day shall come when ten men shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." Whatever there may be reserved for fulfilment in the latter days,—for the glory of that people will arise again in ten-fold splendour when their heart turns to Christ, we cannot help thinking that a partial fulfilment took place on this occasion, when this Jew was sent for by a message from Gentiles, and they were all before God, or before him to hear the words that were commanded him of God. God was with him—salvation was of the Jews—and he was about to declare that salvation unto them. The speech of Peter which follows is in every way remarkable; remarkable as all speeches are, which are delivered under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There is a coherence in it, so that every word is evolved from that which went before. The subject, which might escape you unless you looked closely into it, is adhered to throughout, that the apostle was to teach them the things that related to Jesus Christ: in what

way he does not appear at present to have seen; with the view probably, it might be in his mind, we may venture to say thus much, to their being converts to the true faith by entering the Jewish Church by the only door which was known to the apostles, the door of circumcision.

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said". *Opening the mouth* is a formal mode of speaking, which we meet with several times in scripture. It is always used with reference to something solemn, to the opening of a message, or commission, or declaration. It is used, you remember, with reference to our Lord in the beginning of the 5th chapter of St. Matthew: "and when he was set, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth and taught them saying."—So here a commission was opening to the Gentile world. "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." These words require some little explanation. The word *πρόσωπον* here rendered "a person", and properly rendered so, originally signified "a mask"; and from thence the outward appearance. The outward appearance is that which is here principally spoken of, and not rank, or station, or eminence in life, such as we now have in mind when we speak of "respecting persons." What St. Peter clearly means here is, I perceive now for the first time, although scripture has told me again and again (for this expression "God is no respecter of persons" occurs in substance in Deut. x. 17, 2 Chron. xix. 7, Job xxxiv. 19)—I now comprehend (*καταλαμβάνομαι*) I knew before by the hearing of the ear—I had some knowledge of the truth; now I see for a certainty, that God does not look upon outward appearance—He does not regard one person to the exclusion of another—but He is general—universal in his regard, within the limits of that method of salvation which he has provided for mankind. You will see why I add these latter words, in a very short time, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of

persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him". Now how are we to understand these words? Clearly not in this way—St. Peter did not mean for one moment that the unaided Gentile, alien from the knowledge of God, without the covenants of promise, without God in the world, could either work righteousness or be accepted with Him—we must not mistake the words to mean that. Why must we not mistake them? Because first we know very well *a priori*, (I am not going to lay the principal stress upon that) that such a thing is impossible—that the unaided Gentile, unassisted human nature, cannot work out righteousness, or be accepted with God; but as surely, we know a great deal more than that—we know from what Peter goes on to say: "The word, preaching peace by Jesus Christ" was known to these people; and they were accepted by God, and worked righteousness, because they had heard of that word. They had in their heart the Spirit—imperfectly it may be; but still holding enough of the substance of Christianity to render their acceptance with God, by means of Jesus Christ, a possibility. Now that is very clear from what follows "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached". Now it is very remarkable that Peter sets out, as the foundation of his speech, with a declaration of their previous knowledge of the word of God by Christ. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". The word of God had been taught by Philip the Evangelist, long before these people, met Peter in Cesarea, and had been known to this centurion and his family; and upon that ground he and his brethren were in fact, though not by outward admission into Christ's church, yet by having laid hold of that word, in substance, Christian men: and were thus accepted by God, and were, in the only sense in which

any men can be said to be, working righteousness, namely proceeding upon the hope of salvation by Christ and of acceptance through Him as their Saviour, in humility, in prayer, and in dependance upon God's grace to keep them in the duties and relations of life, and in good works for the sake of Christ. That being so, Peter proceeds now to unfold that word which they knew. But just observe, before we pass on, a few little simple words, which are interjected by way of parenthesis—"preaching peace through Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all)" That was a truth which St. Peter, although he well knew it before, had just had vividly brought home to his mind: "preaching peace by Him who is your Lord as well as ours". Then the substance of that word was, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Why does St. Peter introduce these particulars? To an ordinary reader, it would seem as if he were beginning very far off the subject, and treating of things which seemed to have no connection with that for which they had met together: but upon looking deeper into the narrative of the speech, we find the case was very different. The Gentile world was regarded by the Jews as being specially under the dominion of the evil one: the Jew thought that they were led captives by Satan at his will, and crushed under his power as the enemies of God,—and that the Jews alone were in the light of peace and acceptance with God. When Peter declares that Jesus of Nazareth was anointed by the Holy Ghost, relieving all that were oppressed by the devil, these words are intimately associated with the state of those Gentiles, whom he now sees for the first time to be brought under the healing and pacific influence of the gospel, reconciling them to God: so that the words are not disconnected with the subject, but appear to be eminently belonging to it. "And we are witnesses." It is not without reason that God has enjoined you to send for me - I am one of those who

saw these things from the very beginning. "And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree". Is there not a dawning in the Apostle's mind—nay more than a dawning—is he not distinctly referring to that transference which he now begins to see is taking place, of the blessings offered by Christ, from the Jewish people at Jerusalem, who had rejected them, to the Gentile church throughout the world—embracing at least these Gentiles, and absorbing them into themselves. "We are witnesses of what he did in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem." There the church was planted, and for a time she seemed to be flourishing, and every thing appeared to be going on prosperously; but first the Sadducees, grieved with their teaching the resurrection, and then the Pharisees, annoyed at the depreciation, as they thought, of the law of Moses and the holy place, rose up against the gospel of Jesus Christ, dispersed those who were preaching it, and deliberately rejected it against themselves. "Whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead". Take these last words, "quick and dead," in their literal sense, because many commentators have explained them to mean the Jews and Gentiles,—those who were in life, and those who were dead in trespasses and sins. Clearly the expressions so well known in the confession of faith "the judge of the quick and the dead" must be taken in their ordinary literal sense. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Now you may notice that St. Peter had just reached the point at which it would seem to us, as far as we can at present judge, that he, with his present knowledge, would be at a loss to proceed farther. So far was the language of pro-

phesy. "Whosoever believeth on the name of the Lord shall not be ashamed"—that would be easily conjoined with the other passage which promised remission of sins. He had just reached the point where Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, were merged in one in the faith of Christ; and that alone was the test and the condition of "the remission of sins". What Peter might have said further, we know not; but a chord had been touched, to which God in his infinite wisdom had determined to give a decisive and lasting response from heaven itself. Mention had been made of the universal doctrine of justification by faith in Christ; and at that very first mention, before the Apostle entered at all on the question, whether they were to be admitted into that faith without becoming Jews, and on many other difficulties that existed in his own mind, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." There was not a Gentile present, who was not at once, by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, admitted spiritually into the full fellowship of the Christian church. "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God". We are told afterwards, in Peter's own vindication of himself to the church of Jerusalem, that they received the Holy Ghost *as we did*: "God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ." This was a solemn repetition by the Spirit himself, with regard to the Gentiles, of that which had been done on the day of Pentecost with regard to the Jews. It was in fact the Gentile Pentecost. It was the day when we Gentiles were by implication admitted into the gifts of the Spirit, and the community of the church of Christ: "werè brought nigh, having before been far off".

"Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the

Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days." Now there are one or two things of more or less importance to be noticed, in these last words. You may say, As they had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, what need was there that they should be baptized with water? The answer to this question is an instructive one:—that God, even on the bestowal of extraordinary gifts of his Spirit, does not dispense with his ordinances, which He has commonly appointed as matters of order in his church. There is a great deal of instruction also in another way. We see here what really constitutes baptism. You see what the spiritually-minded man means when he talks of regeneration in baptism. He means to use the word in the full sense, including the baptism of the Holy Spirit—not stopping at the outward ordinance: those only who received the baptism of the Holy Ghost were fully admitted into the membership of the Christian church in the most complete sense afterwards. This is a lesson to us, that whatever we find spoken in Scripture of the baptism,—and we do find the term "the baptism"—it applies to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, taking in, if you will, as it was taken in upon this particular occasion, the outward ordinance as well; but not stopping at that. We are told "The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us" (No Christian man, I may say, no Christian man in his senses would ever imagine that that applied to the outward ordinance, even if the qualification had not been inserted) "(not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ":—that is to say the purifying of the heart by the Holy Ghost—the bestowal of baptism through the Holy Ghost.

There is another instructive point with regard to the same thing. There was the Samaritan case in the 8th chapter: here was another: set the one over against the other. The

Samaritans were baptized both men and women, and after they had received the outward ordinance, the apostles came down to bestow upon them the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. There is no reason for distinguishing the miraculous from the ordinary gifts. The miraculous gifts have passed away; but the abiding presence of and baptism by the Holy Spirit still remain. In the case of the Samaritans, the ordinance was followed by the bestowal of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. In this case it, was preceded by it. God is not to be bound, and we are not to be bound either: we are not to refuse the gift of the Holy Spirit—He exists and works, independently of, and even in the midst of, indecision as respecting outward ordinances. His work is manifested in a holy life that is founded on faith: that is the main thing. Every one who has that, and who sees aright, will be anxious to receive the ordinance in God's appointed way. If there is that lacking, it is a loss to the person—he is so far irregular: but he cannot be on that account, the gift having been bestowed upon him, nor should he ever be in the estimation of man, excluded from the blessings of membership of the Christian church.

There is a minor point also to be mentioned—a point interesting, though not of equal importance. These persons were assembled in a dwelling house in Cesarea, when the proposition is made as to baptism. St. Peter does not say, Can any man forbid me to bid these to go forth, to the water, as they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we, but "Can any man forbid the water" (there is the definite article in the Greek, which is another interesting point). This seems to indicate that the water was brought to the persons, and not the persons to the water. Putting that on one side, and the other cases in the New Testament,—we see that whether it was immersion or sprinkling, was a matter held to be indifferent by the apostles, as it is held by every Christian who sees the matter in a plain scriptural light; the ordinance is one to be administered by means of a certain element, the figure

of cleansing; *how* it is to be administered, is not mentioned, and we need not be troubled, because it is evidently a matter of slight consequence, from its omission.

Having said thus much with regard to the passage itself, let us collect together the thoughts that have arisen from this early history of the church. See where we stand. We have doubtless arrived at the greatest break in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, namely, the admission of the Gentiles into the church of God. It is a new event; a new course of things is about to follow. We shall be precluded from entering upon that course of things, but it does not follow at all that we are precluded from estimating the situation at which we have arrived. For the first time it became true, that the word was gone forth to the end of the world. The great command was, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." In other words, we have arrived at the full accomplishment of the purposes of God through His Son by His Spirit. From that day to this, there has been no more miraculous interference on a large scale with regard to the means of grace. All from that day has been plain. There is no doubt as to what nations are to be admitted, how they are to be admitted, and where the messengers of Christ are to go. Jew and Gentile are one in Christ. But while we yield the Jew pre-eminence most gladly, and honour every descendant of that favored race,—because we believe that God took them from the first to be to the world an example of his covenant dealings, that He has not cast them off, but will again bring them together nationally at the last, and that there are great blessings reserved for them,—we do not yield them any exclusive right within the church of Christ, nor does any one of them, on receiving such knowledge, demand such a right. We are all one in Him. We are all living under the dispensation of the Spirit, now so fully and entirely accomplished. It is his gift, his manifestation in the heart: that constitutes the Christian no privilege of descent, no favour of race or blood, no know-

ledge of earthly things, but the spiritual life; walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit. And is not this an impression worth leaving upon the minds of those who have accompanied us through these expositions? To this all has been tending: from this point is but the narrative of what we have all to come to. We stand as complete at the end of this 10th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, with regard to the dealings of God in the conversion of mankind, as we do at the end of the last chapter, or indeed in the middle of the 19th century. We have here the fulness of the pouring out of God's grace; and, whether we bring our expositions to an end or not, I am glad, if they are to be broken off, that we have reached this point. I hope the impression will be left on your minds, that this narrative has been dictated by God's spirit to show how complete, how providential, how satisfactory, how brought about by the wondrous dealings of God himself, has been the diffusion in the world of the revelation of God in Christ. You see there is no step wanting. The Evangelist Luke did not loosely gather together the records, he found, and throw them into a book to let future generations know what happened here and there. There was the spirit of Infinite Wisdom guiding him from one thing to another, till a record was produced which we can never sufficiently study, or sufficiently admire the connection of with regard to ourselves who constitute the church of Christ.

May God grant that all our studies of the scriptures, carried forward by each according to his own light and according to God's Holy Spirit, may tend to this point—that we may arrive at the spirit of God's dealings, bringing out thankfulness to Him; that we may see that every word in this Book, the Old Testament as well as the New, has been suggested by Him, and may be gathered up by sufficient study, to shew forth His wisdom and His love in dealing with His people. If you go on in that way, laying up wisdom from your study of the scriptures, you will not possess your Bibles in vain, nor will it be found in vain hereafter,

when we shall meet to give an account, I of my ministry, and you of your means of grace, that we have gone over together the last, and, in some respects, greatest of the gospels, and also the Acts of the Apostles: traced God's ways in the ministry of our Lord, and in the pouring out of the Spirit after His ascension.



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